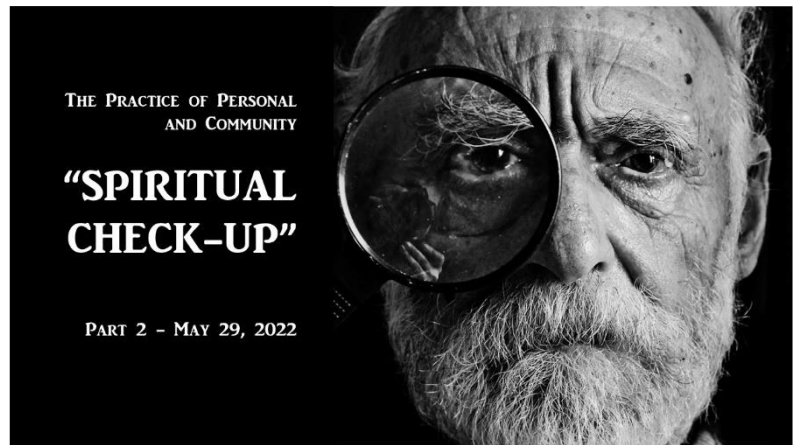


The Practice of Personal and Community
“Spiritual Check-up” - Part 2

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Genesis 4: 3-7 *And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."*

“...sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, ...but you should rule over it.” So often the doors we leave open to Satan occur when a person is at a weak point in their lives.

In other words, when our defenses are down we can become vulnerable to attack and Satan is a master of intrusion and will wait patiently for an opportunity...remember **1 PETER 5:8 NKJ** *“Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”*

The LIVING BIBLE TRANSLATION uses more graphic words: *Be careful watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart.*

What the Bible is telling us is that if we are not careful, demonic intrusion can occur quickly and unwittingly if we are not vigilant and on-guard.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Neither give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27). This verse tells us much about how the devil operates, and it explicitly tells us what our part is in keeping the devil from finding a way into our lives. When Paul wrote, “Neither give place to the devil,” it was not a suggestion; it was a command. If you’ve ever come under spiritual attack and found Satan in the middle of your life, you know that it’s much easier to stop him at the door than fight to get out of the hole you find yourself in after letting him go too far.

Paul warned us to give the devil no “place.” In other words, keep on alert so the enemy can’t freely access your life. That word “place” is the Greek word *topos*. It describes *a specific, marked-off location*. But in this case it is not referring to a physical location...one where we would use a map to identify. This “specific place” may refer to a rough spot in our relationships or our marriages, our finances, our thoughts, or to a personal habit or a lingering area of disobedience. Whatever it is, *it’s an identifiable location that the devil seeks to find and exploit...something that will serve as an open door into our lives.*

As a Christian, we know that 1John 4:4 promises *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, (demonic presence and influence) because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”* But one must honestly ask the obvious question: *is the Spirit of God actually in you?* Of course we must consider issues of true rebirth, or whether there has ever been an actual surrender of our lives in sanctification. Whether we now

operate our lives via the very real control of the Holy Spirit. Is He *Lord*, as well as *Savior*? This issue is crucial and potentially catastrophic. That's why Paul called us to "*examine ourselves...TEST ourselves.*"

However, we must look even beyond this obvious issue, because in the language of "topos," it could be just one or more specific issues...specific areas that we are holding back from God...singular areas that we are rejecting God's directives and oversight. Specific issues that have become doorways for the darkside to enter your life. It's not that God is overwhelmed in that area or is unaware. But it is because in one way or another, you have said no to God *in that specific area*. Maybe you might think that it is no big deal. After all, you are given over to God in so much and you're faithful in so many areas, that one or two seemingly minor with-holds are no big deal, right?

Apparently such an individual is unaware of the principle of the "Achilles tendon." In Greek myth lies the story of Achilles who, unlike his mother, was mortal. She attempts to make Achilles immortal, by dipping him in the River Styx as a baby (the river that runs through the underworld), while holding him by his heel. The one part of his body left untouched by the waters becomes his only point of weakness, hence the phrase 'Achilles heel'. It would be this one seemingly minor area that would be at least the beginning of Achilles spiral downfall and his ultimate demise. Yes, it is only Greek myth, but the reality of the principle certainly isn't.

If these potential doors are closed, you're in a safe situation. If they're locked because you are truly prioritizing a living life in holiness and obedience, you are even in better place. But if you are holding out on God in some matter or some issue, you need to know that the door is not only unlocked — it is effectively standing wide open, literally inviting the enemy to come in and wreak havoc in your life! This is why you must be so circumspect in answering the question: *Are there any open doors I need to close that allow the enemy access to my life?*

We have to be serious about this because the devil is always looking for a door, a window, or just a crack — *some entry point ...some way to squeeze in*— by which he can gain access to us. We must circumspectly look at our lives to see if there is any area we have left open or unguarded that has allowed the devil to find a way to attack us. Because once he gains access, he will seek to exploit that "topos" to eventually and ultimately gain access to your heart and end you. These types of "places" are the open doors he seeks in our lives.

This word *diabolos*...where we get the name "devil," vividly reveals the devil's tenacity. The first part of his name... *dia* means "through," as in all the way through an object. This second part is from the word **ballo**, which means to throw, to hurl, to inject, or even to beat. When these two words are compounded to form the word *diabolos*, the new word categorically means that the devil is one who strikes repetitiously — trying to find a way to break through into our world and mess up our lives. He is so committed to our destruction that if he doesn't easily find his way into our lives, he will linger and wait for us to drop our guard so he can try again, perhaps from another vantage point. The Greek emphatically means he'll even try to *beat* his way inside if it is what is required of him.

Certainly we do not want to minimize the power and care embodied in the Holy Spirit. Indeed without Him we are all dead for sure. It is He who ultimately protects us from the enemy and He does so simply out of a profound love for us. But that does not deny that many times *we* have left a door open which allows the enemy to find his way into our lives and go after us from an inside position. That is simply a by-product of our continued free will. A free will in which God will not intervene. It's up to us to do all we can to shut every door and to make sure they *stay* shut. And during those times we are under attack, it would behoove us to ask: "Holy Spirit, is there is any area in my life where I've left a door open and allowed this intruder to find his way in?" Yet the truth is...if our back is against the wall, we almost always immediately and instinctively know what that door is. God has undoubtedly already pointed it out to us.

Some of these "open" doors are

a. **An Uncontrolled Tongue:** Proverbs 18:21 confirms this by saying, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." Proverbs 13:3; "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." Some folks are seemingly compelled to verbalize whatever inexplicably comes to mind. We always have a choice when we speak. God has given us the incredible freedom to **choose our words**. Some words bring darkness and despair, and are rooted in fear. Some words bring light and hope, and are rooted in love. We have words that are never released, and words that should never have been released. We have words that build up, and ones that tear down. The Book of James has a lot to say on this matter... **1:26** says "*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*" **3:5-6** says "*Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*"

b. **An Uncontrolled Imagination. 2Cor 10:4-5:** *We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.* I spoke of a similar issue last week...it was in fact number 1 on our list. It was labeled "spiritual delusion syndrome." A scenario wherein we have allowed our minds a latitude to run way beyond what is known reality and community truth in the body of Christ wherein God called us. An uncontrolled imagination will open the door to such "spiritual delusion syndrome."

c. **Fears - Philippians 4:6-7** says "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" As children of the Creator, we do not have to be fearful and have been equipped in Christ to rise above such. 1Jo 4:18 says "*Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.*" Being controlled by fears ultimately expose a lack of trust and peace in Christ to have our back, and says that you are still at least **fighting** for the control of your life: *that you haven't "died" to yourself and this world, and God is not Lord over your life.* Fear is not of God...so if you are fighting it, you have left a door open someplace. **2 Timothy 1:7** "*For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*" Remember that Satan is liar always... "*When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*" (John 8:44)

d. **Sinful Habits.** (Eph 4:26,27, Examples = unforgiveness, immorality, pornography, anger, bitterness, and jealousy.) **1 Corinthians 10:13** "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*" How often we are focused on the enemy outside and fail to lock the doors to keep him there. So eventually he finds his way inside and eats away at us like a cancer from within. A perfect example of the results...the manifests of the "open door" here is presented in **Mark 7:20-23** "*...it is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.*"

e. **Stubbornness. Proverbs 29:1** tells us that "*Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be destroyed beyond recovery.*" Sadly...as in all of these open doors, God will leave this one open if that is what we choose, and so often we inexplicably do! "*But no, my people wouldn't listen... So I let them follow their own stubborn desires, living according to their own ideas.*" **Ps 81:11-12**

f. **Emotional hurt. Prov. 15:13** says "by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." Being rejected, or being embarrassed, or even abused! Being hurt by occurrences in life are part of the human experience and no one will be able to avoid all such hurts in their lives. But Hebrews 12:3 casts a different light on such by speaking of

the pains that Christ Himself endured, saying “*Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up.*” In Isaiah 43 God speaks of those that are his saying “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...” When we choose to remain in that quagmire of emotion, we must know that it is our choice to do so, and ours alone.

g. **Anger.** It has been my experience throughout my ministry, that there is one emotion...one act, that trumps all others. One act that will bury all doubts about our actions, all regret, all guilt, all that we know scripture has directed us contrary to our actions. It will silence the voice of God inside us. This is the sin of unresolved and enduring anger. If we can just be angry enough, we can muzzle the voice of God who is trying to get through to us. It is a powerful influence and is a “garage door” for Satan to get to us. Ps 37:8 warns us “*Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.*” And Proverbs 14:29 “*People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.*” Christian counselors report that 50 percent of people who come in for counseling have problems dealing with anger. Anger can shatter communication and tear apart relationships, and it ruins both the joy and health of many. Yet so many people will justify their anger instead of accepting responsibility for it and seeing it for the sin that it is.

h. **Rebellion.** God says in 1 Samuel 15:23 that “rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.” Rebellion is an attitude displayed to contradict authority and it started right from the beginning of Creation. Things that happen to rebellious people:

- Those who rebel are delivered into the hands of their enemies. Nehemiah 9:26
- The rebellious dwell in a dry land. Psalms 68:6.
- If you rebel against the Lord’s commandments, the hand of the Lord will be against you. 1 Samuel 12:14-15.
- The Holy Spirit will turn against you. Isaiah 63:10.

Rebellion is fueled by pride...which is really a “door” in and unto itself. It is the reaction to authority in our lives and is aimed at parents, spouses, churches, or directly at God Himself. It is a door that eventually destroys the bearer even though it is aimed at another.

i. **unforgiveness.** We’re all guilty of offending other people, and we’ve all been offended by other people; that’s the facts of living in a sinful world. But as Christians we’re told to be forgiving people. It’s impossible to live a victorious Christian life with unforgiveness in our life. It isn’t the offense that destroys relationships, it’s the inability to forgive that destroys relationships. Unforgiveness is poison to the soul. Unforgiveness is a sin that locks the unforgiving person in their own self-made prison. Hebrews 12:15 warns us: “*(look) carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.*” We don’t particularly like to hear it, but love takes work. It takes investment of every part of your life and being. My marriage will swivel away to nothing if I do not prioritize it and invest in its health and growth.

If the US marched into the middle east and managed to keep the PLO, Israel, ISIS and the Taliban from shooting at each other would that mean that the middle east had peace? **No.** They might have **calm**....they might have **relief**, but they would not have **peace**! Short of a mutual agreement, Peace is only achieved by an overwhelming **offensive action** that cripples the enemies ability to do you damage...today *and* tomorrow. This is the only way to have real and lasting peace in this spiritual war that we fight. Because with Satan there will be no mutual agreement of peace. C.T. Studd once wrote: *If you don't want the Devil to hit you, hit him first, and hit him with all your might, so that he may be too crippled to hit back.*

One of the signs of where you are...whether you understand what is going on here, is how hard you fight. Perhaps today you have recognized one or more of these “open doors”...these “topos” that are evident in your life. “Examine yourselves...” Paul said. Be ready and willing to do some spiritual house cleaning. The good

news is that we know the great restorer, forgiver and healer, Jesus Christ. So the first step is to go to Him and acknowledge the error and ask for His help. But are you willing to recognize that now is time to shut those doors? It's time to take authority over your actions, words and anything that you have done or said that doesn't line up with the things of Christ. The place to start is confession and repentance. More on that next week...