

Do you ever get the feeling that you're outnumbered, that you don't have any chance against the evil you face? There are some evils that are easy to recognize like the mass shootings in New Zealand, anti-Semitism, human trafficking or child abuse. Hopefully we will never have to personally experience any of these things. There are other evils that are more personal like rumors and gossip that attack your character, postings on social media that spread lies about you, someone putting you down or taking credit for something you did to get ahead or being insulted publicly by others.

Jesus faced all kinds of evil but didn't seek revenge. 1 Peter 2:23 (NLT) tells us, "He (Jesus) did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered." Instead Jesus overcame evil with good. He wants to help us do the same thing.

Before we can deal with the evil in the world or the evil that make assault us, we have to deal with the fact that because of our sinful nature, we have evil inside of us. Romans 3:10-12(NIV) tells us, "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one." We don't like to hear that. Our society likes to say that most people are basically good on the inside.

But when we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we are not inherently good people. We more like fruit that looks good on the outside but is rotten on the inside. Jesus warns us, "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." (Mark 7:21-23 NLT) I don't like reading a list like this because I know I'm guilty.

So how do we overcome the evil within us? We can't! But Christ can. Jesus overcame evil for us. Paul tells us, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT) Not only did Jesus die on the cross to forgive our sins, He makes us right with God. We are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. So when God looks at us, he doesn't see our sins. He sees us forgiven and restored by Christ. Our prayer is that God will make us Pure in Heart. Listen to these words from the song "Pure In Heart" released in 1991.

Lord make me pure in heart. Make my life faithful and true so when You look at me
It's Your righteousness you see. Lord make me pure in heart.

How do we overcome the evil around us? The Apostle Paul gives us some very specific steps to take to overcome evil in our reading today from Romans 12. Paul tells us:

- Don't get even. That's hard to do because our sinful nature wants to even the score. If someone makes us suffer, we want them to suffer as much as we do. But that only makes matters worse. Jesus didn't seek revenge. We shouldn't either. If Jesus died on the cross to forgive the person who hurts us, shouldn't we forgive them too?
- Plan to do good. We are responsible for how we respond to difficult people and situations. They are not going to go away. Our job is to figure out ahead of time how we do a better job the next time we face similar challenges. We need to learn with God's help how to be proactive instead of reactive. That means trust in Christ that doing one right thing after another will overcome evil.

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Lewis and Clark, the famous explorers sent out to map the Pacific Northwest, were saved in 1805 by an act of goodness that overcame evil. Their expedition stumbled into the camp of the Nez Perce Indian tribe in the winter of 1805 looking for food and warmth. Some members of the tribe wanted to kill them and take their supplies. But an old dying woman in the camp saved them. She had been captured when she was a girl and sold to another tribe that took her back east.

When she escaped from that tribe, she found help from some Canadians who took care of her until she could find her way back to her own people. She told the story for years of the light-skinned people who took care of her. When Lewis and Clark expedition arrived in their camp, she said that these were the light skinned people who had helped her. Don't harm them. Goodness done decades before overcame evil years later.

- Do everything you can to live at peace with others. Don't escalate the situation. Don't agitate and make things worse instead of better.
- One way to do that is by loving our enemies. Treating them with love and kindness. Conquer evil with good.

To put it another way, when someone strikes out at you to hurt you with an evil act or accusation, don't curse it, don't rehearse it, don't nurse it – but do reverse it. To repay evil for evil is to become like Satan. To repay good for evil is to become like Jesus. Jesus tells us, **“Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”** (Luke 6:27-28 NLT)

Whether it is within us or outside of us, here is only one power strong enough to overcome evil. That is the power of the goodness of God. So don't give up. It is too soon to quit. The Apostle Paul tells us, **“So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.”** (Galatians 6:9 NLT)