

“BEING AWARE OF THE COMPETITION!”
by Rom A. Pegram (4/19/20)

As we begin today, getting into the 2nd Sunday of our God Strategies series, I want to back up just a moment to Chapter 13 of Exodus (17-18, NLT).

When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, “If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”¹⁸ So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.

Here we find that God was leading his people—right from the start ... and God is still leading his people! Proverbs 3:6 (NLT) tells us: “Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” Because that’s true, we’re going to seek God’s will this morning, as we turn to his word for the day...

When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. “What have we done, letting all those Israelite slaves get away?” they asked.⁶ So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot and called up his troops.⁷ He took with him 600 of Egypt’s best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with its commander.⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, so he chased after the people of Israel, who had left with fists raised in defiance.⁹ The Egyptians chased after them with all the forces in Pharaoh’s army—all his horses and chariots, his charioteers, and his troops. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. – Exodus 14:5-10a (NLT)

The Egyptians, after burying their dead [due to plagues, etc.], finally realized what they had lost—their entire work force! How in the world could Pharaoh’s great building projects go on without this slave workforce? So, *what did the enemy do?* They pursued God’s people! And, he’s been at it ever since (speaking of *the Enemy*, of course).

Folks, don’t forget where we’ve already covered—our first two God Strategies from last week; each week I’ll remind you of where we’ve been, then build on the past strategies, as we introduce new ones. Here’s your reminder of our first week:

- STRATEGY 1: REALIZE GOD MEANS FOR YOU TO BE WHERE YOU ARE!
- STRATEGY 2: BE MORE CONCERNED FOR GOD’S GLORY ... THAN FOR YOUR RELIEF! Next...

STRATEGY 3: ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ENEMY, BUT KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE LORD! The truth is ... *sometimes in life, we might feel pursued* (so the order of this strategy is very important)! Our spiritual lives should be just as real to us as our physical

lives, our emotional lives or our cognitive lives! And, experience has shown me that our spiritual lives *will* be just as real as the rest of our lives ... when we're walking with God *consistently* and trusting in his guidance *daily*!

The truth is the Enemy (devil, etc.) usually works in *a couple of different ways*: **Sometimes, he launches direct, frontal attacks.** I can remember one time in particular, when I was in high school; a classmate and her family had moved into a house in town (from the country). My classmate and her mother were active in our church. One day, my father got a call from the mom saying 'they were having trouble with the new house they'd moved into.' Now, you may be thinking, 'why call a pastor?' If it's a plumbing problem, you call a plumber. If it's a structural problem, you might call a good carpenter. But, if it's a spiritual problem, you call your pastor! My father asked me to go with him that day. I did. And, it left a life-long impression on me. You can call this a ghost story if you want to, but I know it was much more than that. They were having trouble sleeping at night ... due to noises in the house. They sensed it was a spiritual problem. In investigating the history of the home, my father found out the previous owners were *not* Christians (Jehovah Witnesses), but had been into an anti-Christian religion or practice. There were spirits in that house that did not like the new owners, who were Christians. We ended up, IN JESUS NAME, praying through that whole house ... and allowing—through prayer—the Spirit of God to cleanse that place. In speaking to my classmate after that, she told me after we'd prayed through the house there were no more unsettling noises happening during the night. And they lived there for quite some time in peace after that...

Well, that was very unusual, but definitely a frontal attack; the Enemy also has another way of working: **More common is for the devil to be much more conniving and sinister**; Satan has a way of tempting us and working to wear us down—in our areas of greatest weakness! Did you know that? And, the Enemy can be very, very sneaky when it comes to this. Even before we know it, we'll be off God's path and onto some other path—not even realizing that a change has taken place in our lives. That's why it's so important to walk with God *DAILY*! This is also why in Ephesians 6:11(NIV) Paul tells us to, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's *schemes* [*italics mine*]."

This is not something 'make-believe,' folks. The Enemy [of Christ] is very real ... and we need to acknowledge him, while keeping our eyes fixed on Christ! The Apostle John (8:36, NLT) reminds us of our victory in this: "So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." There's our promise from God! Acknowledge your Enemy, but keep your eyes on the promises of God! Then...

Sometimes in life, we need to call our Enemy by name! If you're ever struggling in an area of your life, sometimes it helps to NAME what it is you're struggling with—*who the Enemy is in your life!* For Moses and the people of Israel, it was PHARAOH; *he* was the Enemy they named. *How many times do you hear that name in the book of Exodus, for instance?* And have you read Exodus 14 yet ... to prepare for this series?

A British newspaper (*Sun*) once called the Enemy by name in this headline: **VICAR SAVAGED BY DOG CALLED SATAN** ('Vicar' is an English word for 'Pastor,' so this caught my attention!) The article read this way:

"A vicar," reported the paper, "is recovering from being savaged by an Alsatian called Satan. Alan Elwood, 45, was bitten all over his body and his trousers and shirt were ripped to shreds in the farmyard attack in Westport, Somerset. 'It was terrifying. I was lucky to get out of it,' Mr. Elwood told the *Sun*."

Rev. Elwood is neither the first nor the last Christian to be attacked by "Satan." And we often underestimate the extent to which the enemy seeks to disrupt our lives, don't we? It's true; sometimes Satan gets blamed for things that are really *our* doing; but, many times, the Enemy's at work in our lives and we refuse to acknowledge there are spiritual forces at work. But we can't do that; *we have to learn to acknowledge the Enemy, while keeping our eyes on Christ!* And, sometimes NAMING our Enemy is just the ticket to being able to acknowledge what's really going on...

- When the Apostle Paul encountered people trying to hinder his ministry and dissuade his hearers, he saw the hand of Satan (Acts 13:10)...
- When Paul encountered troublemakers in the church, he discerned the crafty hand of Satan (Rom. 16:17-20)...
- When Paul found Christians harboring bitter or unforgiving attitudes toward others, he saw the hand of Satan (Eph. 4:26-27)...

He named the Enemy, didn't he? Even Jesus occasionally NAMED the Enemy... Do you remember what Jesus told Peter one day, when he was 'off of God's path' and onto the world's (Matthew 16:23, NLT)? Here it is:

"Jesus turned to Peter and said, 'Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's.'"

Author Robert Morgan reminds us of how we can really honor God—not so much by acknowledging our Enemy, but by keeping our eyes on Christ! He says,

"Remember, every time we resist the slightest temptation, we honor God. Every time we overcome even the smallest problem by trusting and obeying our Lord Jesus, God is glorified in our lives. Whenever we choose character over convenience, faithfulness over ease, or honesty over deceit, we bring honor to the Lord Himself. When we serve Him with watertight obedience even in small things, God is glorified, just as at the Red Sea."

"These things," wrote the Apostle Paul about the events of the Exodus (1 Cor. 10:6a, NLT), "happened as a warning to us...." **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ENEMY BUT KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE LORD!** That's Strategy 3; now...

STRATEGY 4: PRAY (with an exclamation point)! In Verse 10, we read: “As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the LORD....” You know ... ***sometimes in life, we need to pray like we mean it!*** When was the last time you *cried out to God* in prayer?

Situations in life usually offer us *one of two options: panic or pray*... My tendency in the past, at times, has been to panic—like the Israelites backed up to the Red Sea ... or the disciples in the storm out on the Sea of Galilee. But God has been patient with me, has loved me, and spent years and years of my life trying to teach me that prayer is the means by which I can (if I so choose) stay even-tempered, cool-headed, & strong-spirited even in the midst of crisis!

So, which one of the two options do you choose ... when your back’s up against a wall? When your life has taken you into a cul-de-sac, with no visible way out ... except the same ol’ way you came in? Remember, Strategy 4 ... is PRAY—*with an exclamation point!* Pray like you mean it; there are times in life where we need to learn to *cry out* ... just like the Israelites did! Then...

Sometimes in life, we need to learn to pray with others! There’s strength in numbers that cannot be overlooked... Have you ever had something going on in your life that was so important that you just had to share it with someone else who understood? That’s what praying *with others* is all about. It’s true that God doesn’t always say YES in answer to our prayers, but He listens very closely when 2 or 3 gather in together in his name (Matt. 18:20)...

Folks, the prayer of the Israelites was not only UNITED, but also AUTHENTIC! They’d never been more *sincere*; it wasn’t just a ritual they were going through! They were panicked; their outcry of prayer was real and raw...

In the NT book of James (5:16b, NLT), it reminds us: “The *earnest* prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” At times, *we need to learn to pray like we mean it* ... and join with others in the process!

So, in the coming days, when you face what seem like impossible tasks or situations—especially during the COVID-19 outbreak we’re in the midst of, remember: there is an Enemy (Satan)! Everyone in this world is not a Christ-follower. *We need to acknowledge the Enemy, WHILE keeping our focus on Christ!* And, we can do that by always turning to God in prayer—united and authentic prayer, just like the Israelites did. There’re STRATEGIES 3 & 4... The next time we’re together, we’ll be on to 5 & 6, learning more God Strategies ... for these difficult times...