UNBOUND | WEEK 4

Deliver Us from Evil

Five-Day Devotional

This week we're carrying one sentence from Sunday. Most of us treat evil like a movie plot or someone else's problem, and we're a little embarrassed when it turns out to be neither. But the gospel says something steadier. The darkness is real, and Jesus has authority over it.

Each day pairs a short passage with someone in Scripture who met opposition and found Jesus standing in the middle of it. Sunday's invitation had three small steps: name it, ask Jesus to speak, and go home and tell. This week takes them one at a time. Read slowly. There is nothing to win here.

Two words of care before we start. First, this week is about Jesus, not about hunting for demons. Please don't go looking for a fight. If something truly frightening is happening in your home or in you, tell a pastor or an elder instead of carrying it alone. Second, much of what weighs on us is grief, anxiety, and exhaustion, and God heals through many hands, including counselors and doctors. If you are ever in danger of hurting yourself, call or text 988 right now.

Darkness has a legion. Jesus has the authority.

DAY ONE

Jesus in the wilderness — you are not fighting a battle He hasn't fought

Matthew 4:1–11; Hebrews 4:15

Start with the part we tend to skip. Matthew says, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Led by the Spirit, on purpose. Mark is blunter: "At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness." The verb is *ekballō* **(ek-BAL-loh)**, the same word Mark uses when Jesus drives out demons. It is a strong verb. The Spirit all but pushed Him through the door.

Now notice the timing. Only days earlier, Jesus had come up out of the Jordan, and the Father had said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The very first words out of the enemy's mouth are "If you are the Son of God." *If.* Before there was a question about bread, there was a question about identity. That's worth remembering the next time a hard week follows a good Sunday. The enemy rarely opens with "Do something wicked." He opens with "Are you sure who you are?"

Then look at how Jesus answers. He doesn't shout. He doesn't perform. He doesn't use a technique. Three times He says, in effect, "It is written," and quotes Deuteronomy. When the devil tries Scripture himself, quoting a psalm to get Jesus to jump off the temple, Jesus doesn't answer louder. He answers truer: "It is also written." Scripture isn't a weapon you swing. It's a place you stand.

Hebrews says it plainly: "we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." And a few verses earlier: "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

So whatever you're facing this week, whether it's fear, a temptation that keeps circling back, or a heaviness you can't name, you are not bringing it to Someone who has never been tested. You're bringing it to the One who walked into the wilderness on purpose and stayed faithful. And when the devil left, Matthew says, "angels came and attended him." Help arrives.

Sunday's first step was to name it. Begin today with the simplest name there is: "Lord, I'm being tested." Say it out loud to the One who knows what that's like.

God who delivers us from evil, thank You that Jesus walked into the wilderness ahead of me. I confess that I have tried to fight in my own strength and called it faith. Here is what is testing me. Jesus, I name it. Speak peace. Amen.

DAY TWO

Daniel by the river — the battle you can't see

Daniel 10:1–14, 19

Daniel was by now an old man, and he was in mourning. For three weeks he had eaten no choice food, no meat, and no wine, and he had been praying about something he did not fully understand. On the twenty-fourth day, standing on the bank of the Tigris, he sees a vision of a man dressed in linen, and it is so overwhelming that the strength drains out of him. "I had no strength left," he says, "my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless."

Then a hand touches him. It happens three times in the chapter. Each time, God's messenger touches Daniel to steady him. And the first words are these: "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them."

Then comes the line that cracks a window into something we rarely see. The messenger says he was held up for twenty-one days because "the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me," until Michael came to help.

Let me be honest. This is one of the very few places in Scripture where the curtain is pulled back, and it is pulled back for about a verse. We're not told much, and we shouldn't claim more than we're told. I would be nervous about anyone drawing a map of the unseen world from these few lines. But look at what the passage does give us.

First, Daniel's words were heard from the first day. Not the twenty-first. The delay was not silence. Some of us have prayed for years and quietly assumed nobody was home. Heaven heard the first word.

Second, more is happening than Daniel can see. Many of us measure God's activity by visible progress, and when there's none, we assume there's none. Daniel couldn't see a thing. That didn't mean nothing was happening.

Third, look at how the messenger ends: "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." The Hebrew for peace is *shalom* **(shah-LOHM)**, wholeness, everything in its right place. That sounds very much like Sunday's invitation: freedom and peace. The messenger's job isn't to impress Daniel. It's to steady him.

Daniel's part was modest. He prayed, he told the truth about how he felt, and when he had no words left, he bowed with his face to the ground and was silent. He did not need to understand the battle. He needed to be heard.

So today, name the battle even if you can't see all of it. "I don't understand what's going on. I only know it's heavy." You don't need the whole map. You need Someone who has heard you since the first day.

God who delivers us from evil, thank You that You heard my first word. I confess that I have mistaken silence for absence. I can't see everything that is happening, and I don't have to. Steady me with Your peace. Jesus, I name it. Speak peace. Amen.

DAY THREE

Peter in the upper room — the One who prays for you

Luke 22:31–34; Romans 8:34

Last week we sat with Peter by the charcoal fire after the denials. This week we go back a few hours earlier, to the upper room, where Jesus says something that is easy to read right past.

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Read it slowly. Jesus tells Peter about the battle before it begins. He names it. And notice what He prays. He doesn't pray that Peter will avoid the sifting. He prays that Peter's faith won't "fail." The word is *ekleipō* **(ek-LAY-poh)**, the root of our word "eclipse." Not that it won't be shaken. That it won't go dark. An eclipse hides the sun for a few minutes. It doesn't put it out.

Notice what Jesus does not say. He doesn't say, "I'll keep Satan away from you." He doesn't say, "You'll pass." Peter protests, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death," and Jesus answers with a rooster. What He says is, "I have prayed for you." And then three words that deserve underlining: "when you have turned back." Not *if. When.* Jesus is already planning Peter's second act before the first one has fallen apart.

Here is what that means for you. Sunday's second step was to ask Jesus to speak. Today, notice that He already is. Paul writes that Christ Jesus "is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Right now, whatever you're facing, there is a voice speaking about you in heaven, and it says your name the way it said Simon's: twice, with the tenderness of Someone who knows exactly what's coming.

And look at the last clause: "strengthen your brothers." The recovery isn't only for Peter. It is already pointed at other people. The thing that sifted him would become the thing he used to hold someone else up. That is Sunday's third step, hidden inside a promise.

So ask Him out loud, in one sentence: "Jesus, You have authority here. Speak peace into this." Then be quiet for a minute. You aren't starting a conversation. You're joining one that has been going on since before you got here.

God who delivers us from evil, thank You that Jesus prays for me by name. I confess that I have fought as though I were on my own. Here is what is sifting me. Hold my faith, and when I turn back, use me to strengthen someone else. Jesus, I name it. Speak peace. Amen.

DAY FOUR

Paul's thorn — when it doesn't leave

2 Corinthians 12:7–10

I want to be honest about something Sunday couldn't fully say. Sometimes you name the battle, ask Jesus to speak, and it doesn't lift. Not that day. Not that year. If you're in that place, today's passage may be the most important one this week.

Paul writes about "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." The word is *skolops* **(SKOH-lops)**, closer to a stake than a thorn, something sharp that stays in. We don't know what it was. Readers have guessed for two thousand years: eyesight, malaria, opponents,

something else entirely. I'm grateful Paul didn't tell us, because it leaves us free to write our own name where his is.

Notice what Paul does. "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." Three times. The great apostle who tells the Ephesians to stand firm admits that he asked, and asked, and asked. He doesn't pretend to be fine. (Jesus prayed three times in Gethsemane, too.)

And notice what Paul does next. He tells the Corinthians. This is a church that was already doubting his credentials, and Paul puts his weakest secret in a letter that would be read aloud to everyone. That is Sunday's third step, done by someone who badly needed it.

Then comes the answer: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." It isn't a no, and it isn't a yes. It's a different yes: *I'm not removing it, and I'm not leaving you in it.* And Paul's reply: "so that Christ's power may rest on me." The word for "rest" is *episkēnoō* **(ep-ee-skay-NOH-oh)**, "to pitch a tent over." Christ's power settles over Paul the way the glory once settled over the tabernacle. Paul doesn't get the thorn removed. He gets a tent.

A word of care. Not every unanswered prayer means a lack of faith, and not every thorn is a demon. Some are diagnoses, some are history, and some are things we will never be able to name. Keep seeing your doctor. Keep taking your medicine. Keep asking. Paul asked three times and received something other than what he asked for, and he did not call it defeat.

So if you've been carrying something for years, don't wait until it's solved. Tell one person today. Not the whole history. Just the name, and the words "I'm still carrying this."

God who delivers us from evil, thank You that Your grace is enough when my prayer isn't answered the way I asked. I confess that I have hidden my thorn and called it strength. Pitch Your tent over me. Give me one person to tell. Jesus, I name it. Speak peace. Amen.

DAY FIVE

The seventy-two — peace to this house

Luke 10:1–20; Colossians 2:15

Jesus sends seventy-two people ahead of Him, two by two, into every town He is about to visit. (Your Bible may say seventy; the manuscripts are split.) He doesn't send experts. He sends them with no extra bag and no extra sandals, and one sobering line: "I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." It is not a great recruiting slogan.

Now look at the first instruction for entering a house: "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'" Not a confrontation. Not a technique. A greeting. If someone there welcomes

peace, "your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you." Jesus' first move in a home is *shalom*.

They come back full of joy: "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." And Jesus says: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." The word is *exousia* **(ex-oo-SEE-ah)**, the same word from Sunday. *Given.* Not earned and not manufactured. Borrowed from the One who has it. The decisive victory wasn't won by the seventy-two. Paul says the cross "disarmed the powers and authorities" and made "a public spectacle of them." The seventy-two weren't fighting for the win. They were walking in it. (And yes, "lambs among wolves" and "nothing will harm you" appear in the same chapter. Both are true. The second is about who gets the last word.)

Then Jesus does something unexpected. In the middle of their celebration He says, "do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Don't build your joy on what you can do. Build it on whose you are.

That's where the week turns. Day One began with an enemy asking, "If you are the Son of God?" Day Five ends with Jesus saying, "Your names are written in heaven." The attack was on identity, and so is the answer.

Remember Sunday's man from the tombs, who began with a name nobody wanted to speak and ended up sent home to tell his story. He, the Twelve, the seventy-two, and you all receive the same commission: go, say peace, and tell what the Lord has done.

So here we are at the end of five days, and Sunday's invitation hasn't changed. Name it. Ask Jesus to speak. Go home and tell. If you haven't taken the first step yet, today is a fine day. And if you're not sure you believe any of this, try one honest sentence: "God, if You're real, bring peace where I feel chaos." See what He does with it.

Darkness has a legion. Jesus has the authority.

God who delivers us from evil, thank You that You wrote my name down before I ever had a battle. I confess that I have wanted to be impressive more than I have wanted to be known. Send me home to my own people, with peace on my lips and Your mercy in my story. Jesus, I name it. Speak peace. Amen.