

TakeFive

Biblical insights for the week of **June 25-29, 2018**
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Fighting Self

Monday — Matthew 16:24

As I was leaving a local boxing gym some time ago, amid the familiar cadence of speed bags and jump ropes, something a corner man yelled to his boxer caught my attention. "Stop trying to *look* like a fighter and *be* a fighter!" he said. I literally stopped in my tracks. What a powerful statement. Just *how* powerful, I'd realize a few moments later.

Walking toward my truck, I came upon a film crew set to shoot a documentary -- a *boxing* documentary, no doubt. Lights, cameras, and make-up. I stood and watched a make-up artist applying shades of purple, black and blue to an actor's face. Boxing gloves? Check. Legitimate shorts? Those too. But he wasn't dressed for - nor returning from - a *real* battle. "Stop trying to look like a fighter and be a fighter," ironically echoed in my head.

For Today: I wonder about my faith. And maybe you wonder about yours. Am I a make-believer in life? Or do I help make believers *with* my life? For that to be true, we must fight the foe of self. And that is our focus this week.

Tuesday — 1 Corinthians 3:21-23

Waking up this morning, I was tempted to wallow. The start of the week began with a bout of body aches, but those are the least of my body blows. I woke up today fighting the foe of self.

Perhaps like you, the self is that opponent I seldom slug. See, I pull my punch. I love him too much. But even when I do (by grace) knock him down, he is never out. Inevitably, out of my periphery, I see him getting up off the canvas. He is relentless. He is as unwelcome to me as the sunrise to the sleepless. (I would know.) What's more, there are no neutral corners with him. He ignores the bell. He won't stay down. And like a seasoned sparring partner, he knows my soft targets. He knows where it hurts.

Why is the self so tough to fight? Timothy Keller describes the self as "empty, painful, fragile and never happy." One thing is certain; we can't fight him alone.

For Today: Is anyone in the ring? What are your soft targets? Tomorrow I'll share mine, but ask God to search your heart.

Wednesday — 1 Corinthians 4:7

What did God reveal to you yesterday? If it helps, here's what I fight...

Self-pity: My sin, my guilt, my fits of anxiety and my bouts of depression, my loss of health, dignity, friendships...those are the fast jabs. Those hit me swiftly and quickly each day. While they don't knock me out, they hurt as deeply as any. Like a punch to the nose, even as I type this sentence, they make my eyes water.

Self-promotion: Oh how I want to brag humbly! I long for attention, demand respect, and crave credit. Look at me! Don't forget me! I need to be regarded and rewarded. I want a name for my 'self.'

Self-righteousness: I can think highly of myself, I privately judge and quietly pat my back. Even admitting that seems to satisfy me in ways I know aren't godly. My good works are rags, and yet I won't throw in the towel on my 'self.'

For Today: Ask God for a gospel-view of you.

Thursday — 2 Corinthians 5:17

As we continue our week's theme, the fearsome battle rages. If only I could simply tell my 'self' that I've had enough. (But that's not enough.)

A.W. Tozer says, "*Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can only be removed by spiritual experience. The veil is made of living tissue. It's made of the quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and to make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross, and death no death at all. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. It is never fun to die.*"

For Today: Think of how deeply satisfying it will be one day when our 'self' will no longer dare raise a fist.

Friday — Galatians 2:20

So, that's the fight. That's the reason behind this week's pugilistic theme. By His grace, we are forgiven, saved, and delivered. Even though we're in a ring, we're free. We may feel beat up, but we're healed. That's why we get up off the floor to go another round. See, grace doesn't make us soft. Gentle, thankful, grateful maybe, but not soft. Grace doesn't give our self a break. That's the fight.

So, as we thank God for seeing us through another week, we thank Him most for going the distance for us. For loving us that much. For seeing beyond our faults and meeting our direst need. The need for a Savior. Someday it will come naturally for us. Until then, we do what isn't natural, easy or painless. We put up our dukes, and we fight. We bring our self to the cross.

For Today: Ask God for peace and wisdom. Thank Him for fighting for you.