

Dear friends in Christ,

When you Google something, that search engine only searches about 4 percent of everything out there in cyberspace. Something called the deep web has the other 96 percent—all of which is hidden to most people. There is some technical stuff and some military stuff on the deep web, as well as secret, forbidden communications and more.

But the really scary part is that there is another hidden part of the deep web. That hidden part is called the dark web, where you can find stolen credit card numbers for sale, mail order marijuana, killers for hire, sex trafficking, illegal betting, and much more. It’s frightening!

When God tells us there is a darkness to this world, he includes SOMEONE in that darkness—an enemy who is both invisible and evil. We are in a struggle with this darkness. We should not enter battle without knowing something about the enemy we are facing. Let’s look at God’s “Reconnaissance report,” for we are facing off against the ruler of darkness.

If a robber tries to invade your home, you will defend yourself in whatever way you can. You have a flesh-and-blood person to deal with, somebody you can see and strike. But listen to the apostle Paul’s chilling words. Our biggest battle isn’t with some local gang. It’s with an invisible, evil force. He warned us: **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).**

We face a dangerous enemy. We’re not talking about make-believe ghosts. We’re talking about the devil and demons, which are all evil and real angels, who are 100 percent on the dark side. As unrepentant followers of their leader, Satan, the goal of demons is to destroy you and me and everyone else—destroy our faith, destroy our life, destroy our hope, and destroy our soul. There is nothing fascinating or attractive or funny about Satan, whose very name means “enemy.”

Paul’s references to rulers, authorities, and powers indicate that the evil angels are organized in a military fashion with leaders and soldiers who follow the ringleader—Satan. We make sure to call them demons because there must be no confusion between them and the millions of angels still in heaven and around us here on earth who are always working for our good. On the other hand, the demons bring darkness with them—a spiritual darkness that can smother our souls.

The goal of all demons is to remove saving faith. They want to cut us off from God and his saving grace. That’s what spiritual darkness is—being separated from our Savior. It’s walking and talking and appearing to be doing the things of a normal life but having a dead soul inside. It’s being dead to God. No desire for him. No love for him. No faith in him. Satan hates you. He is actively waging war on you. The devil wants your soul to be dead so that you end up dead eternally.

God’s reconnaissance report goes on to compare our enemy to a hungry wild beast. The apostle Peter said it like this: **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).** It’s startling to see this picture because it means the darkness in this world doesn’t sit still. It’s like a hungry lion on the prowl. It’s an active, evil darkness!

If we have friends or family members who are his victims currently, it’s time for us to get serious in this battle. Let’s find ways to start conversations about the hope we have in Jesus. And let’s pray for them. We also pray for ourselves, because God tells us that we are caught in this battle with a liar.

At some point in your life, somebody lied to you. As a result, you are more careful now when people make promises. That’s sad, because if someone is not honest, we know we can’t trust that person. Jesus told the Jewish people who were plotting to kill him about who was behind their dark plot: **“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).**

Jesus knew Satan. He knew that he hates God, and he hates you and me. He even wants to murder us eternally in hell, where the screaming will never stop. Now, if you speak English or Spanish or another language as your native language, you use that language all the time, every day. Satan’s native language is lying. He uses it all the time, every day. All he

wants is to hurt and destroy. The name devil means “slanderer.” He’s angry and jealous of what God has given us in Jesus. He works hard to get us to doubt or question God’s Word.

He likes to use two favorite and effective lies. First, he tells you that you are such a good person that you don’t need Jesus because God could never send someone like you to hell. The second lie is just the opposite but no less effective. He will tell you that you are so bad that not even God wants you. Both lies. He wants us to believe that God is not fair and doesn’t care about you or me. He wants us to get deeper into his darkness: to be angry at God, to reject God’s promises, to hate God. He wants you to stop using God’s Word so that you will be totally, spiritually dark and dead.

That’s why the Son of God went forth to war! It’s not hopeless. Our reconnaissance report for battle includes a clear report on what God has done for us: he has put a light in the darkness.

We turned the lights on for worship tonight. And light always defeats darkness! Even a small candle pushes back the darkness of a big cave. More important, another light shines here, far more powerful than the bulbs shining above our heads! That light led you here. That light has pushed out the very darkness that Satan has tried to shove into your heart. That light has given you hope and faith and a future in heaven so bright that the Bible describes us as no longer needing the sun or moon for light at all for eternity! John is talking about Jesus when he says, **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4,5).**

Did you catch the battle in that verse? **“Darkness has not overcome it.”** Our hero, Jesus, fought against our dark enemy Satan many times, as we find it recorded on the pages of the New Testament. Most of the time, Jesus used his Word to defeat him. Sometimes he used miracles to undo the damage of illness and death that Satan had caused.

Both Jesus and Satan used the cross as their war weapon. Satan thought he had defeated Jesus when Jesus died on the cross. Of course, we know that Jesus used the cross as his ultimate weapon to beat all the forces of darkness—the devil, the world, our sinful flesh, and death itself. Satan is defeated eternally, but like a terrorist who is cornered, he wants to take as many of us as possible with him to hell.

Thank God that you and I have been given the wonderful gift of faith in Jesus. Through that faith we see Jesus for who he really is—the Savior of the world who brings forgiveness and freely gives eternal life to those who believe in him: **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:4).**

I can’t see anything when I’m in the dark, so I need to get my flashlight to walk around without smashing into something. But it’s much worse for those who do not trust in Jesus, because they are living in spiritual darkness. There’s only one flashlight for that kind of darkness, and it is Jesus. Jesus is life, the source of all light and life.

In response to the light and life that Jesus has brought us, we will now live our lives in thanksgiving for all he has done for us. We will do the best we can for him who died for us. We live for his glory and not our own. We look at our family members as precious, blood-bought souls. And we will do whatever we can to help them grow in Jesus. And when we see our unbelieving neighbors our heart will go out to them and we will seek to share with them the good news of Jesus, the light of the world.

So, let’s not be naïve to the darkness that is out there in our world, the darkness that Satan is trying with all his might to pull us into. But let us also not live our lives in fear. For we know the one who has shattered the darkness, Jesus, the light of the world, your Savior and mine. Continue to look to him for guidance and light. Remain in his Word which will be a lamp for our feet and a light for our path, until the day when our Savior welcomes us into the glories of heaven. Amen.