

Resistance (Part Two): Solutions

Basic Steps to Confront Human Nature

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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The last time I spoke, we considered the subject of resistance. At the beginning, we talked about the resistance a writer faces in attempting to start, continue, and finish a book. We found that that is analogous to our overcoming spiritual resistance which stymies Christians all the time. It always rears up its ugly head when we attempt to put on the new man and overcome sin.

I have felt, after thinking about it for those intervening weeks, that it is such a pervasive problem not just among Christians, but among mankind in general (but specifically to us) that maybe I should spend one more sermon talking about it. So I want to take another look at resistance today in a very similar way to the way I did the last time. But you will see that there is going to be quite a bit of change at the end. I should probably go over it again just in case you have forgotten or need a little bit of a refresher on it.

As I mentioned last time, the idea of artistic resistance has been extensively explored by an author named Steven Pressfield. He wrote *Gates of Fire*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, etc. His book on the art of writing is called, *The War of Art*. I always want to say, *The Art of War*, which is Sun Tzu's version of something very different. But he calls 'the war of art' actually overcoming resistance. The war is a writer's battle against the forces that are trying to keep him from putting words on a page. And he calls it 'the war of art' to indicate just how much firepower is necessary to overcome resistance and reach our goals.

A lot of people think that writing a book is easy. It is not. It is one of the hardest things you will ever set out to do. I know. I have been trying to write books for years and I have hardly finished one. It is a horrible thing, almost, because you have these ideas and you want to put them down on paper and you always find time to do something else. You never really have the time or the energy, or you find something else to do. The words just do not get there unless you actually sit down in the chair and type them out. But our minds, as tricky as they are, will find ways to sidetrack us.

So it all often takes a battlefield mentality to push through resistance and achieve victory—because that is what you feel like when you have finished one of those things. You feel like you have climbed Mount Everest or defeated the Spartan army at Thermopylae or something because it is just an awesome feeling that you have actually done something. And it may not sell one book—you may not even sell it to the publisher—but it feels good that you have finally finished it because the process has been so excruciating in certain ways.

So that is what Steven Pressfield's book is all about: Recognizing and overcoming artistic resistance to make whatever it is that you want to make (whether it is a book, a painting, a sculpture, or whatever it happens to be).

Now last time I defined resistance as a negative, insidious, implacable, powerful force that works to keep us from doing our work and thus reaching our potential. All those words are true (negative, insidious, implacable, and powerful). All of those are true of our own nature because basically, as we have seen, what is making resistance happen is our human nature. We saw that it manifests itself in many different ways: Writer's block, procrastination, rationalization, distraction, depression,

disorganization, reorganization, re-reorganization, you know, going back and filling the holes and the backstory—I have done that!

I have had an idea for book for a decade. I wrote the first couple of chapters and I had the end in mind and what I wanted to do. And I thought “You know, this book doesn’t really mean anything unless you have what happened before.” So I started another book. Then went back and described what happened before this book and I got a couple of more chapters into it. And I thought “You know, this doesn’t explain enough. I have to go back even farther.” So I started a third book to explain the backstory to the second book, which explains the backstory to the third book. And I can do this all the way back because that is just how resistance works.

So there are three books that I am writing and I am hoping I can finish at least one of them before I leave this earth. But it is just one of those things. That is how resistance works.

Remember that humorous incident where the writer was just so stuck by resistance that he put on all of his clothes in different ways and tried on every outfit that he had in order just to be distracted, to waste time so he would not have to really sit down and write? And, of course, it manifests itself in other ways too, not just for writers.

You all know who Henry Fonda is: One of the greatest actors of the silver screen. He used to throw up every time before a show especially when he was on stage, but he might have done this when he was on film as well. That was resistance working itself in him. He had to throw up and then he could act. It was almost like a ritual. But he had to get over that fear, which is another way that resistance shows up. As a matter of fact, resistance most often shows up as a kind of fear—a fear of moving forward. All those things are part of resistance, part of trying to keep you from actually doing what you really want to do.

But the most significant component (beyond negative, insidious, implacable, and powerful) is that *resistance is all inside us*. It is all *internal*. It is something that our mind generates. It is something that our flesh generates. It is part of our human nature to want to stop us from doing what it is that we want to do. It is all self-generated, making it a kind of self-sabotage. We sabotage our own goals, our own plans because we fear what it takes to reach them.

So resistance is a sinister facet of human nature. It is a response to a person aspiring to be better, do something better, to grow, to be greater, to be noble, to produce something that people will enjoy. They might criticize it too, but it is something that oftentimes one makes art not just to get something out of the mind on to paper, or on to a canvas or whatever, but it is also for the enjoyment of others.

But our mind, our human nature, wants us to stop us from doing things like that. It is just the way things are because human nature is a horrible thing when you come down to it. It is terrible. Human nature resists change because it is comfortable with the way things are, with the status quo and it does not want to move off of the status quo. It does not want to become anything different because human nature does not like movement at all unless it is backwards. Because backwards is often comfortable; backwards is sliding; backwards is not having to put on any effort because human nature is essentially lazy and stubborn. It loves the way it is and it does not want to change. And it becomes especially strong and stubborn if the potential change is real improvement that leads to growth or success because that is just too much work.

Human nature, we have to understand, is egotistical and self-preserving. It hates the sacrifice and the deprivations that growth and success and doing anything worthwhile always demands. If you really want to do something great, you have got to put aside just about everything else and oftentimes it takes putting aside even one's own wellbeing. Not just the things you want to do, but sometimes it is sleep and health or whatever. You just have got to do it.

Moses, when he went up on the mount to do something wonderful, which was to go meet God and bring down the Ten Commandments, had to fast for forty days and forty nights. Do you think there might have been some resistance in him—not only for that but the fear of going before God? And human nature would definitely resist something like that. But, of course, Moses was a faithful man though. We will find later that he resists just as much as the rest of us.

So human nature does not like to make sacrifices, does not want to lose anything, and that is what it feels it will do if it has to give in to our goals. So as soon as an individual starts to consider achieving something noble or meaningful, it resists and it will use whatever means at its disposal. And I mean 'whatever.' It will sink low—as low as it can go, as low as your mind can conceive—to stop you. It will trip you up in the most backhanded, underhanded, red-handed ways because it is human nature, and human nature is influenced by Satan the Devil and it will reach into his bag of tricks if it can.

So not only is resistance always lurking, it always gets stronger. Both as our excitement increases about achieving our goal and as we near the finish line, it will get stronger. Resistance rises or strengthens to balance our eagerness or the place we are on the line of our goal. It will always increase to stop you and it will get stronger and stronger as you get toward the end and try to reach it.

I do not know why it works this way really. I just know that it is the influence of Satan the Devil—and our flesh as well (I should not leave that out). Because it cries out and struggles against any kind of good. It does not matter if it is good for you, or good spiritually, or just plain old better than something else, human nature does not like us to reach for something better. And it is just a fact of what we have to deal with. So human nature will pull out all the stops to keep us in our comfort zone because it is trying to preserve itself, trying to preserve the status quo.

But as daunting and as resourceful and as strong as resistance is, it *can* be beaten. When you are doing something physical like writing, painting, sculpting, crafting, or whatever you do, you can overcome it. You can put it down through hard work, and useful habits, and strict routine, and a never-give-up attitude until the goal is reached. That is basically what Steven Pressfield does. In his book, he gives you these ideas about how you can do all these things to overcome and finish your artistic endeavor.

But those things (hard work, useful habits, strict routine, and a never-say-die attitude) have their place in overcoming worldly resistance, but they are not going to be enough to overcome spiritually. That is another monster altogether—overcoming our human nature and the sins that are still lurking within us.

We have to understand something about our nature before we go any further. We have to understand why I have been talking this way about resistance. Because you may think I am overblowing it, or I am making it sound a lot worse than it really is, or that it is not as difficult to overcome as I make it seem to be. Let us go Romans 8 and find something out about our nature. This is a memory scripture from way back, but we need to understand this.

Human nature's opposition to God's law, His character, is feral. Do you know what 'feral' means—like a feral cat? It is wild, has no training, has no control. It is just all out there. It is like a dog that has been bitten by a raccoon and now has rabies. It is just wild and frothing at the mouth. And that is essentially what Paul says here:

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

The carnal mind is human nature. That is the mind in humankind that is influenced by the flesh, all of our selfish desires and our needs, and Satan the Devil with the broadcast of his evil nature. Paul's statement here is very blunt. Do we really realize what Paul means by this?

Now *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* makes a very interesting comment about the word here that is translated in our Bibles as 'enmity.' It is the Greek word 'echthra'. But Vine remarks on this word that 'echthra' is the opposite of 'agape.' Hatred, enmity, opposition, hostility are the opposites of the love that God wants us to show. Our minds are full of 'echthra.' Of course, we have been washed clean by the blood of Christ and we have started on our journey of putting on the new man. But that hostile nature still lurks within and we spend our entire converted lives fighting that carnal mind that is full of hostility and hatred.

What Paul implies here or what he is suggesting is that our carnal minds are in total and unyielding antagonism against God. That is why I used the word 'feral.' It is a wild rebellious mind and all it wants is its own self-satisfaction and self-preservation. Our fleshly mind, our human nature is absolutely and totally hostile, implacably in opposition to God. It hates God and wants to rebel at any and every opportunity.

That is why Paul is imploring us here in chapter 8 to live according to the Spirit because God's Spirit is bringing in totally opposite attitude. He says "You can't live with God with all this echthra in your carnal, fleshly mind. You have got to at least balance it off by living in the Spirit."

Of course, our goal is to totally overwhelm it and live totally in the Spirit and not by the carnality of our minds because it is so invasive, insidious, powerful, and evil, and we carry it about within ourselves all the time. This is the resistance that we feel when we try to do something good, when we say "Oh, I need to overcome this particular sin (whatever it is for you, fill in the blanks)" and you say "Oh, just one more time. It won't matter." Because that is resistance saying "I don't want to give up doing what I'm doing. I like this. This is the status quo for me. I'm enjoying it." So we have to put that down by any means necessary so that we can follow what God wants us to do, which is to overcome the sin. But it is tough because it is that influence—that evil, anti-God influence—that is yammering at us all the time within our own minds. So this must inform our understanding of resistance.

Human nature wants nothing at all to do with anything even remotely associated with God, His law, or His way of life. It is enmity against God, hostility, hatred, abhorrence. Can I use any better words? I will get out my thesaurus so we can talk about this. But do you understand what I mean? This is what we are fighting against.

Anything good is considered with at least suspicion, if not downright abhorrence itself, because it might lead to regard this good thing and human nature does not want that. Certainly, Satan does not want that. You could say that our human nature has an instinctive antipathy for anything smelling

remotely like it could be good, godly, noble, or altruistic—an instinctive antipathy for anything good. So when we aspire to removing our carnal hatred and putting on the image of Christ, our anti-God nature resists powerfully. It does not want to take any chances that there is going to have to be sacrifices made.

Just think about verse 9 of Jeremiah chapter 17. It says:

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart [the nature that we have is what it is talking about here; instead of saying ‘the carnal mind,’ it is talking about the heart] is deceitful above all things [and this is the part I wanted:], and desperately wicked.

It is corrupt beyond anything that we understand. So God says: “Who can know it?” Who can know what it is going to do next? Who can know what kind of scheme it is going to come up with to trick us into not doing what is right and good? It is sick, incurably sick and this is what is fueling what resistance to doing what God wants us to do. It is this evil heart, this evil mind, that we have to stomp down, quash however we can, so that it will not keep us from doing God’s will.

So understand how terrible this human nature is that we have been loaded down with. Talk about baggage. When we come into the church, it would be wonderful if our minds were just swept clean and we did not have to deal with human nature anymore. But God does not do it that way. He cleans us up of our past sins. We are forgiven of those and justified before Him. But it takes years and decades—scores of years, half-centuries, a long time—for God to go through that process of sanctification with us, to try to get us to overcome that nature that still lives within us that is resisting His urgings through the Spirit all the time.

So we will continue to look into this subject of resistance for the remainder of this sermon because I feel that while I may have described resistance and given a few examples (Jonah fleeing Tarshish, Peter walking on the water, or the Jews killing Stephen—all examples of resistance), I think I rushed at the end to fill in the ‘what to do’ part—the ‘how to overcome’ part. So I want to look at a few more examples just to make sure we understand what is going on, and then I want to concentrate on four to five steps that we can take to overcome resistance.

Let us go to Judges 6 for another example. This puts you in the time of Gideon the Judge. I will just tell you the background of the story. The Midianites, who were related Semitic people to the Israelites, had grown mighty and numerous. They had become the leaders of a confederacy of Midianites, Amalekites, and what is called here “the peoples of the east” (most likely these are Ishmaelites or Arabic tribes on the Arabian Peninsula). So these were all a bunch of people who were related to the Israelites, but they were taking advantage of them during a time of weakness.

As soon as the harvest would come in Israel, so would the Midianites. They would roll in and they would slash and burn and take the whole crop, as much as they could carry, and burn all the rest and leave. The Israelites were terrified of them. They really could not fight back. They were not organized to do anything like that. And so they would run up into the hills, into the caves, into the dens—into whatever fortresses that they had up there—and hide while the Midianites and their allies did the things that they wanted to do. And then once the Midianites cleared out, they would come back out and see what they could restore. So it was a very bad time in the history of Israel.

Let us start in verse 11 and read the first part of the story of Gideon.

Judges 6:11-24 Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, “The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!” And Gideon said to Him, “O my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” So he said to Him, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” And the Lord said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”

Then he said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You.” And He said, “I will wait until you come back.” Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them. The Angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread [now that is a grill!]. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face.” Then the Lord said to him, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.” So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-Shalom [which is, ‘The Lord is Peace’]. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

What we have here is this mighty man of valor hiding in a winepress. And he is threshing wheat, there in the winepress, during the summertime. So you know what time of the year it was: They would thresh the wheat during the summertime. It was usually by about Pentecost that it was ready, and so they would have to dry out and then they would thresh it to remove it from the stocks and winnow it to get out the chaff. But you can see here, from just the very beginning of the story, that Gideon’s fear is palpable. That he is, in a way you could call him, quaking in his boots there in the winepress, trying to hide his activity from the Midianites.

So you have got to understand that this whole passage begins with the resistance of fear: Gideon is afraid. I do not blame him. It was a horrible time. But he begins with fear. So what he does, in the ensuing verses here, is understandable. But he is already in an attitude where human nature—his fear of these Midianites, the fear for his life—is basically driving things.

But let us look at this. Gideon resists what God wants him to do at least twice. The first is in verse 15, once he guesses who is speaking to him. Now I do not know if you noticed, if you looked at the marginal references in your Bible (if you have them), but in verse 13 he says, “O my Lord!” The Hebrew behind that is ‘Adonee’. And ‘Adonee’ is the word you would use for Lord, Master, or Sir, to a man. But if you go down to verse 15, he says “O my Lord” again and this time he uses ‘Adonai’ because by this time he has come to recognize that this is not your ordinary man. So by the time we get to verse 15, he has already figured it out that this is God that is talking to him: Adonai, the Lord.

Let us couple this in with his fear here. That not only is he fearing the Midianites. He is in this winepress, threshing out the grain, trying to remain quiet and unseen, and then he is visited by this man who he does not know (he calls him “My lord”), someone who is above him in station, and then he figures out that it is God—the Angel of the Lord. What do you think his fear level is now? He has just gone from fear of the Midianites, which is a little bit far away, to the fear of God which was right in his face. And so it is ramped up to 11, if you know what I mean. He is quaking but he is still resisting because his fear is driving his resistance.

So he gets who is speaking to him, and what he does is he balks. And I do not think any of us would fault him for balking, for hesitating, because what he says here is “My clan is weak. My tribe is weak. I am weak. How do you expect me to do this work for you? I’m a nobody.” Basically that is what he says. “I am nobody from nothing special. Why do you want me? Why do you not go find some village elder somewhere who has experience? Or a man of valor?” Now God had chosen a man of valor, but Gideon was just so afraid that he did not recognize that he was a man of valor. Once Gideon was finally convinced, he turned out to be quite a man of valor.

But right now he was very afraid. So he looks for a convenient excuse. He tries to weasel out of his commission by making this statement that “I’m nobody from nothing special. I’m from the back edge of nowhere. I come from no family. I’m just not the right guy.” Today we might call this sort of excuse selling oneself short. That he did not see who he really was and what he could do. Maybe he was being overly modest. I do not know. In your fear, do you get overly modest? Maybe you do. But perhaps he had a kind of an inferiority complex. I do not know. But he was definitely looking for an excuse. He was displaying resistance to the idea of doing God’s will and becoming Israel’s savior. And, like I said, I do not see him as any less of a man for his doing this because I think every one of us would have tried to get out of it somehow, especially in that situation.

The second act of resistance that Gideon showed here is his test of God. That is what he basically is doing here in verses 17 through 21. He is testing God to see if He actually is who He is. Now Gideon had already guessed who He was, but he wanted to test Him to prove that he was actually the Angel of the Lord, and so he stalls. That is essentially what the test was. It was a way of stalling, of giving him some time. How long did it take for him to take a goat, kill it, prepare it, bake the bread? All that took some time. So he was able to maybe think things over. And God was patient with him. He just sat there and waited for him to come back. But he was showing his uncertainty here because even though his mind had put together all the factors to make him understand that this was God, he still wanted to test God to make sure he needed a sign to make sure it was absolutely certain that this was God. So we can call it what it is: It is seeking a sign.

Remember what did Jesus said about those who seek a sign, in Matthew 12:30? He said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.” Do you know why He said that? Well, for one thing, those who seek a sign are actually obeying their human nature because they are not believing what God said or what is the truth. It is an act of faithlessness when you seek a sign because if God says it, it *is* going to happen. He had already told him he was going to save Israel. Why did he need a sign? But what he is saying here, by seeking the sign, not in so many words, but he is saying, “I’m not quite convinced. I need more proof.” Do you know that could go on and on and on, almost *ad infinitum*—seeking proof of something?

“Oh that might be good to convince somebody, but not me. I need a little bit more. You’ll have to do better than that.” That is kind of what he is telling God here. I want more proof. But God wears down his resistance with patience and persistence. He is not getting up. He is not going anyplace. When he

brought the offering back, He was still there waiting and He persevered with Gideon until Gideon finally got the idea that He was the one.

Actually, God put him through a test, told him to take down the altar of Baal, and make a sacrifice on a new altar to Him. So he did that. But Gideon still was not completely convinced. He goes and he blows a trumpet and calls all his relatives, the Abiezrites, to him because the Midianites were coming, and the people come from all Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. So he gathers the tribes together. Obviously, in doing this, he is taking upon himself the leadership mantle. And then what does he do? “Oh, I’ve got all these men. What am I going to do? Well, there’s all these Midianites down in the valley. We’ve got to go fight them!” So we have verse 36.

Judges 6:36-37 Then Gideon said to God, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said [Had he not said that?]
—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.”

So he asks for another sign. What is he doing? He is delaying by another night.

Judges 6:38-40 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water [so God gave him plenty of proof]. Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me [because he knew he was pushing the envelope here a bit], and let me speak just once more: Let me test [he even uses the word ‘test’; he is doing this to test God], I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

So he managed to resist for two extra nights at least, doing what he needed to do, just because he wanted some more assurance that he was the one that God had chosen to do this. That is resistance. It is like he just could not bring himself to take the next step and really believe and know that God had chosen him and would work through him, as He had said. It was his human nature saying, “No, not me. I don’t want to do this. I might die.” It is very human. It is something we would all do. And God shows that His instruments are very human and they have to overcome the same sorts of things that we do. We have not been called to defeat the Midianites but we have been called to enter His Kingdom and that is an even bigger mountain to climb. But we have the help that we need.

So, to Gideon’s credit though, this is the last indication of resistance from him in the entire biblical record. He was still afraid (it says that in Judges 7:9-11) and God said: “Hey if you’re afraid, you can take your servant down into the camp with you when you go search out these Midianites.” And so he took his servant with him. But God was with him and they defeated the Midianites. So, even after all that resistance, he overcame and did the will of God.

But, it is not just Gideon, even the great Moses resisted. I was kind of astounded when I went back and looked at the account in Exodus chapters 3 and 4 and how many times Moses resisted God. There are five of them.

1. He started with “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and deliver this news?”

2. Then he stalled by asking Him “What name should I tell the Israelites is the name of the God of their fathers? They might not know.”
3. “What if they don’t believe me? What kind of signs can I show them that will convince them that I am coming from you?”
4. And then finally, he begged off because he was not an eloquent man. He was not the guy that could do this.
5. flat out said, “Send somebody else!” That is when God got mad at him and said, “Go! I am sending Aaron with you.” He had had enough.

(So, hey, watch it! When you get to number five, feel the wrath of God.)

Even one as faithful as Moses resisted. And that is the case in a lot of occasions when someone is first called to a task that God gives them. It seems to be a common term among God’s servants.

Ever heard these excuses?

“I’m too young!” That is Jeremiah.

“What you have me doing is too hard. This is awful, God. I’ve been crying for weeks.” That is also Jeremiah.

Here is another one. “I can’t go to Israel. I have unclean lips.” That is Isaiah.

“Oh, I’m just a sheep breeder. I just work on the sycamore trees.” That is Amos.

And then there a couple of New Testament ones whose names I do not know because Jesus used them as examples, but one of them said: “I have to bury my father.” Then another one says, “Let me say ‘Goodbye’ to my parents and my family.” And another one said, “Who will plow my fields and gather the harvest?”

I am sure that God is relieved and pleased and proud as punch when somebody—the rare individual—says: “Okay, Lord, what else do You want me to do?” There were a few of these, at least as far as we know from the biblical record.

Noah. God says, “I am going to destroy the earth. Build Me an ark. Get all the animals.” And it says, “Noah did exactly what God wanted him to do.” Then there is Abraham. “Get you to this country that you do not know.” Abraham saddles his donkey and leaves, and takes all his people with him. And then there is Ezekiel. “Ezekiel, I want you to lie on this side for this many days and this side for that many days and do all these other strange and weird things.” And you know there is no hint of Ezekiel saying, “God, please! Someone else. I had bedsores for weeks.” No, he did not do that, obviously (or evidently). And then, of course, there are the disciples which, to their credit, dropped their nets and followed Him. That was a wonderful thing.

I want to go to one more very egregious example of resistance. That is in Matthew 16. It may be one of the most egregious examples of resistance in the Bible. It is Peter again. Poor Peter, God just let his human nature flap in the breeze for us to see and made him an example (oftentimes a bad example) for us. But I guess if you are going to be Peter, that is the kind of thing you have got to expect.

Matthew 16:21-23 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord [or, as the margin says, “May God be merciful”]; this shall not happen to You!” But He [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men [“and demons”—maybe we could add there].”

In modern parlance, we could say that Peter channels Satan’s refusal to accept God’s will. That is why Jesus calls him Satan because Peter, in that moment, gave in to resistance and became the adversary. What he is saying here is that “No, You won’t give Your life for the sins of the world. You won’t rise again and ascend to heaven and open the way for people to have salvation and a relationship with God.” That is what Satan wanted. But Peter was channeling Satan’s attitude that “This shall not happen to You.” He had totally given in to the resistance and did something that was anti-Christ, anti-God.

This is how far resistance will try to drive us to ignore, to deflect, or even try to defeat God’s will—for us, for others, for the world—because Satan certainly does not want a good thing to happen, and all of God’s plan and all of God’s will is good. So, clearly, the real target here is Jesus. He is trying to dissuade Him from His mission, but the resistance was in Peter who could not see God’s gracious plan. He could not see God’s mercy. Even though he used the word “Far be it from You” or “May God be merciful,” he could not see because Satan was blinding him. That what Jesus had just said about Him dying and being raised again was the ultimate in godly mercy even though Jesus Christ the man would have to suffer.

So the resistance in Peter, out of care for his friend Jesus, made him turn the situation totally upside down and spew out Satan’s words. That is how strong resistance could be and how far off the path it can take us. Now, luckily, Jesus was there to rebuke him and change his attitude. But we have to be careful. Satan wants to take us and rend us too in that same way. So we need to be very careful how our attitudes make us change. We have got to keep that attitude the right way, which is what I am getting to now.

Resistance is terribly difficult to overcome. As we have seen, this is obvious because resistance is just a function of carnal human nature. Carnal human nature is hard to overcome. It is ingrained in us from years and years of following it. We know how hard it is to defy and deny the influence of our base nature. We have tried and tried and tried and there are still sins that we have a hard time with, that nag at us. Most of the time we can hold them at bay, but there are other times we cannot. It catches us when we are weak.

Now the ultimate solution to resistance is to replace our carnality with spirituality, with God’s nature. We know that. That is what we are all trying to do. That is what sanctification is all about—where God is trying to make us holy, as He is holy. That is what the plan is. What we are trying to do,

obviously, is replace Satan's nature and the pulls of our flesh with the influence of the Holy Spirit and the character of Jesus Christ. But really, saying that ends up being little more than a platitude. That is what we need to do, but it does not tell us *how*. It just gives us the goal. And we even resist that because human nature is trying so hard to keep us from doing it.

So how do we smash down resistance? Well, the answer is that we have to develop a new mindset or a new attitude. Some would call it a new worldview. We are talking attitudes here. The steps we actually go about to do these things are going to be individual in us. There are ways that you go about overcoming a sin that might be different to the person sitting next to you. We each approach these things differently, but it is the attitude that all of us need to have the will make the difference.

Let us start in I Timothy 6 and get the basic element of the attitude that we need. This is the first pillar, you might call it, of a godly attitude (at least in my way of thinking). I am going to jump in here into this verse at the second 'He.'

I Timothy 6:15-16 He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

These might be good verses to memorize because they are the basic fundamental principle of the attitude that we need to have, and that is God. God is sovereign. God is King and Master over all rulers and all authority. God is the Governor of the universe. God is immortal, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient and He is deserving of all honor and glory. We all know these things.

But this is the understanding that we have to have at the forefront of our minds at all times. We can never let this fact slip even into the recesses of the mind. It has always got to be there. God is and He is awesome! He is there—always, in us. He is far more transcendent and majestic than we realize, than we can even imagine. We cannot imagine what He is like. As Paul puts it here, He dwells in unapproachable light. It is like He is just a blaze of astonishing power and light and glory. We do not understand it. It is far beyond us. And I have not even mentioned His wisdom, holiness, and supreme intelligence beyond all comprehension.

That is the first part of the attitude that we have to have: That we serve a great God, and that He has His eye on us, and He is working with us. He has chosen us and He lives in us through His Spirit.

Back to Isaiah 55. God tries to get us to understand this just a little bit.

Isaiah 55:8-11 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

We have to keep that in mind. God is thinking far above anything that we can think. His plans go way beyond what we can imagine. And when He says something, His word is golden: *It will happen*. We can never let that leave our minds. His will prevails. No matter how things look, no matter how much people project it is going to go another way, it is *always* going to go God's way. Like I said, He

is watching us. Not only is He watching over us, He is watching to see what we are going to do and He is judging the house of God. So that should give us some motivation and some understanding how we have to think.

Now let us go back to the book of Proverbs, where there is a treasure trove of wisdom on overcoming resistance. But I am just going to go to one section in Proverbs 3, the first eight verses. The overall subject here is wisdom and I want to glean. I think I have got four points here. We have the foundation that God is, that He is there, and powerful, and working for us.

Proverbs 3:1-2 My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

This section of Proverbs is a command and a reward: Command-reward, command-reward. If you do these things well, then this is what is going to bring back to you in goodness and blessing.

Proverbs 3:3-8 Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.

I have gleaned four points from the section.

1. Etch God's instruction on your heart. Know what God desires through His Word. This one is study—study, study, study, read the Bible, read the Bible, read the Bible. Know it backward and forward. Because it must not be just *in the Bible*, it must be *in our minds* (etched on the heart, memorized if need be). But certainly known thoroughly so it can be brought up in an instant out of your own mind. Not so you are scurrying through the Bible. He wants it in our heads so that any situation that comes up at any speed, we have an answer of what God would want us to do. So we first have to know what we must do. That is why this is important.
2. Do not just learn but practice mercy and truth, as it says in verse 3 (“Let not mercy and truth forsake you”). These are two mega-important words in Hebrew: ‘Chesed’ (mercy) and ‘emeth’ (truth). *Very important words*. These words indicate ‘lovingkindness,’ or the agape love that we are enjoined to have by Jesus Christ, and ‘emeth,’ which is translated truth, would probably be better translated as ‘faithfulness,’ ‘loyalty.’ So God wants us to practice lovingkindness and loyalty, especially to Him, in everyday situations all the time. One commentary I looked at said these two words together, in the Hebrew part of the Bible, are often used to represent the righteous character of God Himself. Kind of condensed down into these two: lovingkindness and loyalty or faithfulness. God wants us to live His way by these two major principles, until it becomes ingrained in our own character and the influence of human nature diminishes. It will still be there—it will always be there as long as we are in the flesh—but as we grow, as we keep on practicing mercy and truth, we should be able to quash the resistance more and more easily and with far greater moral authority than we could when we were newer in our conversion.
3. Trust God. Have faith in Him and in His instruction. And the corollary is: Do not expose your foolishness by trusting yourself. That is the stupidest thing you can do. Think about it.

Infallible God on one hand says, “Do this”; stupid, foolish, ignorant, fallible man on the other side saying “No, I would rather do this.” Which one do you trust? God. *Always give Him the priority. Always do what He says.* It is craziness, sheer stupidity, to trust yourself. What kind of experience do we have? If we are a hundred years old, God has lived forever. He has seen every situation. He knows exactly what needs to be done and He tells us what we need to do. But we trust ourselves. But if we acknowledge that God is right *all the time*, it says there in verse 6 that He will provide a smooth or a straight path (that is what the margin says there). We just have to trust Him enough to walk it. Do you know what happens? Do you know why we have stumbling blocks and go off the path? Stupid, ignorant going my own way. That is when we run into problems. But if we had just listened to God in the first place, He would have kept us going straight toward the Kingdom of God. No stumbling blocks. No turning of the path. We get ourselves in trouble and that is our problem.

4. Be humble. Do not take yourself so seriously. Do not think that you are so big. Realize your lowliness, that you are a worm, that you are an ant, that you are nothing—compared to God at least. Recognize what Jesus Christ said in the first of the Beatitudes: You are poor in spirit. You do not have enough to know better. You are just a babe in godliness. Even if you have been around for a long time, especially in comparison to God, we have to recognize that we are not paragons of virtue because we still have human nature in us and that is evil. It is bad, it is being influenced by Satan the Devil. So instead, what does He tell us to do? Fear God. Respect Him. Respect and revere Him and the fact that He knows what is right and good. He knows what we should do and we need to fear Him and fear disappointing Him and do it. And of course, it says here, we need to divest ourselves of all sin, evil, wickedness, transgression, faults, bad habits, you name it. Get rid of any kind of evil. And notice the suggestion, how it is put in here in verse 7: “fear the Lord and depart from evil.” Well, it sounds like you just went to the airport and went to the gate and you left on a plane. Or you went outside your house and you left. No. Do you know what the image is here? Run! Run from it like it is an enraged bear or a nest of hornets. Get away from evil. And if we do this, notice what the reward is here. It says that it will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. What it is talking about here is that you will be spiritually healthy and strong. Is that not what you want? Do you not want to be spiritually healthy and strong? Well, fear God and run like the dickens from evil. If we do that, resistance will have little chance against us.

Now these seem like basic things, do they not, but they are the essence of overcoming our resistance to God and His way of life. There is no arcane formula. There is no complex procedure that we need to do. Just put God first. Study His Word. Practice your faith. Be humble. Fear God and put out sin. Not very involved and complicated at all.

But now we go back to what Steven Pressfield said about artistic resistance. What does he say it took? Hard work, good habits, strict routine, and a never-give-up attitude. That is where those come in because, in order to do these other basic things, *we have to make ourselves make the efforts to do them.* It does take a lot of diligent effort, and oftentimes that is the rub. Resistance comes in and gets us right there. We do not want to make or do the work.

Let us conclude in Ephesians 6. We all know this, but I want you to see it one more time as we close. This is the attitude that we have to have when facing our spiritual resistance and when facing down the Satan the Devil.

Ephesians 6:10-14 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places [and, may I add, against human nature and our own desires of the flesh]. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth . . .

You will see many of these basic things repeated here.

Ephesians 6:14-18 . . . having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

So we have our marching orders from Christ through the apostle Paul. So be strong in the Lord and stand fast in the power of God which He has given to you.