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TONY EVANS SPEAKS OUT ON PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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TONY EVANS

THINK AGAIN

PERSONAL STUDY NOTES



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PRAYER

My normal method of driving is with my car's gas tank as near empty as possible. I stop at a gas station only as a last resort. Anytime my wife, Lois, has to drive my car, she first asks if there is anything in the tank because she knows I drive on fumes.

One reason I do this is that I've gotten away with it so often. I can't tell you how many times I've pulled into the gas station just in the nick of time.

One time when Lois was with me in the car, she was telling me I was going to get in trouble someday driving around with an empty gas tank. Sure enough, the car started to cough and run out of gas, but I was able to exit the highway on a downhill ramp, and there was a gas station at the bottom.

So I said to Lois, "See what happens when you know Jesus?"

Well, I wasn't as fortunate the next time my car ran out of gas. I wound up stranded on the side of the road, standing by my car feeling very embarrassed.

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Take it from me. You won't get very far driving around on gas fumes. That's a very powerless, frustrating way to travel.

A lot of Christians are trying to operate their spiritual lives the way I drive my car. They are running on fumes—trying to get somewhere for the Lord without using the fuel that provides the spark that energizes the power of God resident within us through the Holy Spirit.

The fuel that provides the spiritual spark is *prayer*. You can't get very far in the walk of faith without a prayer life, yet many Christians are doing it because they think they're getting away with it. They're like me in my car, ignoring their need to pray until their tanks go empty and they wind up on the side of the road looking for help.

Many of us struggle with the spiritual discipline of prayer. Some believers know how much they need to cultivate a prayer life as a vital part of their daily lives. To others, prayer is more like the national anthem at a ball game. It gets the game started, but it is not seen as having anything to do with the action on the field.

It helps to know we are not the first people to struggle with prayer. Jesus' disciples watched

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Him pray one day and said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

That's interesting because they didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to preach. But when the disciples watched Jesus pray, and saw the intimacy between the Son and the Father and what the Father did for the Son, they said, "We need to get in on this."

Jesus answered the disciples' request by offering a model prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. That's actually a misnomer, because this is not a prayer Jesus would pray. Jesus had no "debts" or sins to be forgiven.

This is really the disciples' prayer. Jesus didn't mean this was the only prayer we are to use, or that we need to pray these exact words. The Lord's Prayer is a marvelous example, an outline, of how to pray. It gives us a pattern for prayer.

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THE PARAMETERS OF PRAYER

Before we begin a detailed study of this amazing prayer, let me give you a basic definition of prayer. *Prayer is a believer's communication with God the Father, through the authority and Person of Jesus Christ, assisted by the Holy Spirit.* Let's break this down.

The key word is communication, not just talking. God is a Person to be communicated with, not someone for us to talk at. The test of prayer is whether God is the audience of your conversation.

Our prayer is to be offered through Jesus Christ. The only reason you and I have access to God is that the door was opened by the blood of Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

We can't come into the presence of a holy God unless we are escorted by the Son. That's why we pray in Jesus' name. That's not a nice religious tag to tack on to the end of our prayers. Jesus is our access to God, and

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because of what Jesus did on the cross we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16).

Prayer is also assisted by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26-27 says the Holy Spirit helps us in our prayers because we are weak and don't always know how to pray as we ought. Sometimes we don't know what to say, and other times we're hurting too much to say anything.

But look what the Holy Spirit does for us. "The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (v. 26b). When all we can do is groan and grope for the right words, the Spirit interprets those expressions and turns them into intelligible requests before the Father. The Spirit knows what we mean even when we don't know what we mean.

In other words, the Holy Spirit's ministry in prayer is to take what cannot be clarified and clarify it. That's why you're not wasting your time praying even when you don't know what to say, because the Spirit is at work organizing your confusion.

True prayer is limited to the sphere of the Trinity—but that means the parameters of prayer are limitless because we are talking about the infinite God.

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THE PRECAUTIONS OF PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer is set in what I call a precautionary context. That's because before Jesus gave His disciples their model for prayer, He taught several important principles about prayer that we need to consider.

The first principle is that we need to pray *regularly*. Jesus said, "*When* you pray" (Matthew 6:5, italics added). Notice He didn't say "If you pray," or "It's up to you whether you pray." Our need to pray is the unstated assumption behind Jesus' statement.

Prayer must be a regular part of our lives because it's such a critical part of our lives. One reason prayer is so important is that it is an expression of faith, and the Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus also said we need to pray *sincerely*.

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to

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you, they have their reward in full. (Matthew 6:5)

This takes us back to verse 1, where Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

Most of the Jews in Jesus' day prayed three times a day. The hypocrites who prayed only to be seen and heard by others went to the most crowded, public places to pray.

They were like the little boy whose grandmother was visiting. He was praying in his bedroom one night while his mother and grandmother were sitting in the living room. His mother heard him say very loudly, "And Lord, please give me a bicycle for Christmas."

She went into the bedroom and said, "Son, you don't have to yell. God can hear you."

"I know, Mom," the boy answered. "But Grandma can't hear very well, and she's got the money to buy me a bike."

How do you measure sincerity in prayer? Jesus told us, "When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who

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sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). We must pray *secretly*.

Jesus wasn't just equating being alone with effective prayer. Praying in secret means refusing to make a show out of prayer. It means shutting out anything and everything that keeps you from concentrating on God. A closed door refers to an undistracted environment for prayer.

Obviously, shutting yourself off from other people and distractions is one way to achieve secrecy in prayer. This is crucial because it doesn't take much to drown out God's voice. God is a spirit, so if you are going to connect with Him you must connect spiritually.

When God sees that you want to be in His presence so much you're willing to remove all distractions—when He sees you in secret and knows you are not playing to the crowd—then He shows up.

God also wants us to pray *thoughtfully*. "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7). "Meaningless repetition" means babble, and babble means thoughtless verbiage, saying the same words without any thought behind them.

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If I asked you for your home address, you could probably rattle it off without even stopping to think about it. You've given out your address so many times you have it down cold. That's the way some people pray.

I remember when I was a boy, if my mother had fried chicken for dinner and it was my turn to pray, I prayed with my eyes open and my hands on the far side of my plate. That way, I was ready to grab the piece of chicken I wanted.

I can tell you, I wasn't thinking about God. My mind was on that fried chicken. I just had to get past the prayer to get it.

Sometimes, prayer is just words we toss out to salute God so we can get on to the real deal. *Hurry up and pray so we can start the meeting and get to the real issues.*

The best way to avoid meaningless repetition is to continue getting to know God. The better you know a person, the more the two of you have to discuss. Whenever you learn something new about our great God, include that in your prayer life.

Jesus added, "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). You don't have to inform

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God of anything in prayer. As a good Father, He already knows all about you, including what you need.

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PRIORITY ONE: GOD'S WILL

When we begin to understand how vital it is to pray regularly, sincerely, secretly, and thoughtfully, we are ready to learn more about how to pray. That was the next subject Jesus addressed with the disciples as He taught the Lord's Prayer.

Let's go through this great prayer phrase by phrase as we seek to understand what Jesus is teaching us about prayer.

The Paternity of Prayer

You probably know the first two words of the Lord's Prayer. This is a child addressing a loving Father. Jesus said, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:9).

Notice this is "Our Father," not "My Father." You're not an only child in this family. The Father wants us to know that when we come to Him other siblings are involved. We can't be selfish in prayer.

Since only believers can pray and expect God to hear, "Our Father" means God is not

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everybody's Father. Jesus said to the unbelieving religious leaders of His day, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). Only those who receive Christ as Savior and are born from above are given the right to be called the children of God (John 1:12).

The fact that all believers are invited to pray to the Father means all of us have equal access to God. He doesn't have favorite kids. If you're in the family of God, you bear His name and have full access to the Father.

Let me tell you some wonderful things about the heavenly Father to whom we pray. When you have a real father who loves you and cares for you and protects you and disciplines you, you have somebody you can trust. Your welfare is always on his mind. In fact, you can trust a loving father's heart even when you can't figure why he's doing what he's doing.

Being able to say "Our Father" also addresses the problem of worry. Later in Matthew 6, Jesus talked about worry (vv. 25-34). He said don't worry about having enough food or water or clothes. In fact, it's a sin to worry because Jesus commanded us not to do it (v. 34).

You say, "I'm not worried, Tony. I'm just concerned."

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Well, if your concern is keeping you up at night, it's a worry. If your concern is ruining your health, it's a worry. If your concern keeps you constantly depressed, it's a worry. And it's sin.

What's the cure for worry? Knowing and trusting your Father. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to to you" (Matthew 6:32-33).

Jesus said His Father even takes care of the birds (v. 26). Have you ever seen a worried bird? Do birds get high blood pressure or bad nerves from worry? No, they just go out each day knowing there's going to be a worm or a seed somewhere. Having a Father who cares means you don't have to worry.

It also means you don't have to be afraid, even in the most difficult circumstances or the darkest hour. Those may be the times when you don't know what your heavenly Father is doing in your life, but since you know He has your welfare at heart, you can conquer the fear the Enemy throws at you.

If God is your Father, He's also in charge. He makes the final decisions. You can make your request and tell Him what you want, and

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sometimes He will say yes. But because God is dealing with His whole family and not just one child, sometimes He will say no for His greater purpose. He has that prerogative as our Father.

Praying "Our Father" means we accept His right to discipline us too. Every good father disciplines his children, and God disciplines His own (Hebrews 12:4-11).

Let me give you one other benefit that comes to those who can legitimately pray, "Our Father." This statement of intimacy means availability.

No matter how many meetings I may have at church, no matter what I may be doing, my children can always get through to me if they need me. My assistant, Sylvia, knows that whenever the kids call, she can go ahead and put them through. I may not be able to talk to them very long, but I want them to know that my work at church doesn't get in the way of my being a father.

Let me tell you some good news. Being Ruler of the universe doesn't get in the way of God's being our Father!

After saying "Our Father," we are taught to say, "Who is in heaven." Why do we need to be

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reminded in prayer that God our Father is in heaven? Because it tells us He is not subject to the limitations of earth. Earth does not have the final say-so in our lives. God rules from heaven, so He can do anything He wants to do on our behalf.

Jesus taught us to say to this Father who rules from heaven, "Hallowed be Your name." The word "hallowed" is from the same root as the word "holy." It means to set something or someone apart as unique or special. When we pray this way, we are saying, "God, I recognize that You are in a class by Yourself. You alone are holy."

The name of God deserves to be hallowed because God's name is the sum total of His attributes. In the Bible, a person's name reflects that person's character.

If you know your Bible, you know that God has many names. Each name addresses a different aspect of His perfect character, and each one also speaks to any situation we might find ourselves in or any need we might have.

Not all of these names are readily obvious in the English text of the Bible, so let me give you the Hebrew word or words, their translation,

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and what they mean. Here are some of the names for God in the Bible.

In Genesis 1:1, God is called *Elohim*. "In the beginning, Elohim..." This is a plural word that emphasizes God's majesty, power, and glory. *Elohim* is the mighty Creator God who can speak worlds into existence and meet you in your weakness.

God is also *El Elyon*, "God Most High." This name means He's the God who is high and exalted and can do great things. David wrote, "I will cry to God Most High, to God who accomplishes all things for me" (Psalm 57:2). When everything in your life is out of order and disjointed, you need to know *El Elyon*.

In Psalm 91:1, the psalmist urges us to "abide in the shadow of the Almighty," *El Shaddai*, a name for God that speaks of His strength. Even when you have no strength, you have not exhausted your resources because God says, "My name is *El Shaddai*."

Another wonderful name for God comes from an unlikely source. Sarah's Egyptian maid Hagar, who bore Ishmael to Abraham, was thrown out of the house by Sarah. Hagar thought she was finished, but God came to her and promised her a heritage through Ishmael. Hagar responded by calling God *El Roi*, "God

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who sees" (Genesis 16:13). Even when you feel like you're alone and have no hope, God sees you. He hasn't forgotten you.

God is called *El Olam*, "the Everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33) who is in no hurry and will take the time to do what is best for us.

There are so many more names for God in the Bible, and each one has a special meaning and holds special hope for us. Let me give you a few more examples.

Jehovah is the most sacred name of God, which speaks of His self-existence. "I AM WHO I AM," God told Moses (Exodus 3:14). *Jehovah* needs no assistance. This name was often paired with other words for even more emphasis on part of God's character.

He is *Jehovah-Shalom*, "the Lord is Peace" (Judges 6:24), the only source of lasting peace. God is also *Jehovah-nissi*, "the Lord is My Banner" (Exodus 17:15). The banner was raised as a rallying point for an army going into battle. It was a symbol of victory.

We're talking about the name of God, which Jesus said is to be hallowed. One way to avoid meaningless repetition is to think about the awesome names of the God to whom we pray. There are so many more names.

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The Lord is *Jehovah-raah*, our Shepherd and Provider (Psalm 23:1) and *Jehovah-rapha*, the Lord our healer (Exodus 15:26), meaning you're never alone. And when we sin, God is *Jehovah-tsidkenu*, "the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6), who covers us with His righteousness. And when we have a need, God is *Jehovah-jireh*, "the Lord Will Provide" (Genesis 22:14).

Your Father in heaven is in charge.

This is the God who teaches us to call Him "Our Father."

You don't need to know Hebrew to know God. When you pray "Our Father," you just need to know that He is everything you will ever need.

The Program of Prayer

The next sentence in the Lord's Prayer is the first request made of God, which is "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10a). Once we get God's person in focus, then we must connect with His program.

That is a simple request to make, but let me show you what it means for us to pray that God's kingdom will come. When we were born again by faith in Jesus Christ, we became citizens of God's kingdom.

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The word *kingdom* means rule or authority. So when we talk about God's kingdom, we are talking about His comprehensive rule over all of His creation. The Bible is very clear that God holds ultimate authority. "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (Psalm 103:19).

Your Father in heaven is in charge. So when you pray, you are not coming to some anemic ruler who is powerless to help you. God is sovereign over all.

But if God is the sovereign Ruler of His kingdom, that places some demands on us. In other words, we cannot hallow God's name if we are not willing to serve His kingdom. We can't pray, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name," and then say, "Now let's discuss my program on earth." When it comes to the kingdom program, heaven informs and rules over earth, not vice versa.

King Belshazzar of Babylon, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, learned that lesson the hard way. Belshazzar thought he could mock God during a drunken orgy, but a hand appeared and wrote the king's doom on a wall. Belshazzar panicked and called in the prophet Daniel.

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Daniel reminded Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar had been driven mad "until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes" (Daniel 5:21). Then Daniel said, "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this" (v. 22).

Daniel 5:23-31 tells the rest of the story, including the famous handwriting on the wall and the fall of Belshazzar's kingdom that same night. God will not allow any earthly kingdom to impose its rule over His heavenly kingdom.

It's important to remember that God's kingdom is spiritual at its source. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33).

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (v. 36).

Jesus was saying His kingdom is from the spiritual realm. That's why prayer is so important. It transports you to another realm above and outside of the physical realm, the world of the five senses. God's kingdom is invisible—although when Christ returns the

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kingdom will be made gloriously visible for a thousand years.

But for us today, learning to pray according to the pattern Jesus taught us, the kingdom of God is invisible. So when we pray for the kingdom to come, we are asking God to make His invisible kingdom visible in our experience.

But in order for this to happen, God's program must be the preoccupation of our lives. You can't pray "Your kingdom come" and then come to God only when you want something to enhance your program. That's not what prayer is all about. You don't get God's benefits and blessings without submitting yourself to His kingdom rule.

What are we praying for when we pray for God's kingdom to come? We are asking God to manifest His power. Before Jesus' ascension, the disciples asked, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus told them not to worry about when He was coming back, because the immediate issue was the progress of God's kingdom program in their lives. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (v. 8). Jesus was saying, "You will have to wait for

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Me to come back, but you will not have to wait for My power."

God's power is made available to us so we can make the kingdom proclamation that He is Savior and Lord. Jesus went on to say in Acts 1:8, "You shall be My witnesses."

Now this raises a question. If we have all the power of God available to us to carry out His plan of proclaiming the kingdom, why are so many Christians so powerless, and why don't we witness more than we do? Why aren't we proclaiming the King?

The answer is that we are so detached from God's kingdom program that we don't really want to talk about His Person. According to 1 Peter 2:9, we are designed to be a kingdom of priests proclaiming the excellencies of Christ. If we're not excited about seeing God's kingdom made manifest in power, then we're not going to get too worked up about proclaiming the excellencies of our glorious Lord and King.

That's tragic, because God's kingdom comes with a glorious Prince. The prophet wrote,

A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called

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Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

That's a prophecy of Jesus Christ in His first coming as the Child of Bethlehem and His second coming as Prince of Peace who will rule God's kingdom. Isaiah said there would be no limit to the increase of His rule and His peace.

As we said, Christ will rule on earth when He comes back, but because His kingdom is spiritual and eternal we can experience His peace and His rule in our hearts today.

But notice that those two things go together. If we want God's peace, we must accept His rule. And the more peace we want, the more His rule must increase in our lives. When we are ready to enact God's program, His government, we will enjoy His kingdom peace.

The Priority of Prayer

The next principle of prayer that Jesus taught in the model prayer of Matthew 6 is this: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (v. 10b).

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If we are going to bow to the rule of God's kingdom program, it makes sense that we will want what God wants, when He wants it, and the way He wants it. That's a basic definition of God's will, which is His priority for us.

But bowing to God's will is a struggle for many believers, for the reason we mentioned above. We spend too much time asking God to rubber-stamp our program and our plan. But let me point out that we are halfway through the Lord's Prayer and our requests haven't even come up yet. Those don't start until verse 11. God's Person, His program, and His priority come first.

What are we asking for when we pray that God's will would be done? There are three basic aspects of God's will.

The first is God's comprehensive will, His overarching plan for His creation. This means that nothing catches God by surprise. He never has to say, "Did you see that? I didn't know that was going to happen."

God also has what we could call His compassionate will. This includes His stated desires, which may or may not come to pass.

For instance, God's will is that all people be saved (2 Peter 3:9), although it is obvious that

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not everybody is saved. Jesus said of Jerusalem, "How often I wanted to gather your children together.... and you would not have it!" (Luke 13:34). The reason God's compassionate will does not always come to pass is that He allows human beings a choice.

Don't misunderstand. No choice by a human being or the devil himself will slow God down at all or hinder Him in any way in accomplishing whatever He wants to accomplish. That's good news because it means other people can't stop the will of God for you and the devil can't stop the will of God for you.

The third facet of God's will is His commanded will. These are specific things God has commanded to enable us to be the full beneficiaries of His program. For instance, Paul said that God's stated will for us is to avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Romans 12:1-2 is the most comprehensive statement of God's will for His people:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

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by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

God's will is flawless, perfect in every detail (see 2 Samuel 22:31). So when we pray for His will to be carried out on earth, we are asking for an awesome force to be unleashed.

Let me say a word about what should happen when we come into conflict with God's will. The mere fact we have to pray "Your will be done" means it is possible for us not to do it. Jesus taught us to pray this way because our human will often clashes with God's perfect will.

Why do we sometimes oppose God's will, even as believers? One reason is that we're not really sure we can trust God. We are saying to God, in effect, "Lord, I'm not sure if I do this Your way that it's going to come out for the best. I'm afraid to trust you with my life."

Another time we conflict with God's will is when we want to go our sinful way no matter what God says. What we want to do looks good, tastes good, and feels good. It's what we want the way we want it when we want it—the exact opposite of God's will.

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What is God's concern in our praying? This is stated in the last half of Matthew 6:10. God's concern is that His will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." We need to see how God's will is done in heaven so we can do it the same way on earth.

First, God's will is done immediately in heaven. When the prophet Isaiah had his great vision of God, he saw seraphim with six wings, two of which they used for flying (Isaiah 6:1-2). The picture here is of swiftness, angelic beings ready to obey God's command in an instant.

God's will is also carried out fully and perfectly in heaven. There is no debate or discussion in heaven about God's will. The only person who ever debated God doesn't live there anymore. In heaven, there is full conformity to the will of God.

God's will is also done absolutely in heaven. There is no other being in heaven with a will that is independent of God or in conflict with Him.

Jesus is our great example here, because He never failed to do what His Father wanted, even when it meant the cross. Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is our model: "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Prayer is a

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means of getting heaven's will done on earth, not getting earth's will done in heaven.

So what's the payoff for doing God's will? That is given to us in the last half of the Lord's Prayer, when it comes to praying for our needs (Matthew 6:11-13).

For example, when you do God's will you get to pray for His daily bread, His forgiveness for your sins, and His deliverance from temptation. But when you do your will, you get to find your own bread, you have to deal with your own sins, and you must try to protect yourself from the devil's attacks.

The apostle John wrote,

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

John is saying that if you are willing to say to God, "Your will be done," and really mean it regardless of what you may want, then your prayers are going to get ears opened in heaven. Jesus said in John 12:26 that whoever serves Him will be honored by His Father.

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I hope you know that doing God's will doesn't mean a problem-free existence. It doesn't mean the absence of tests.

Jesus once ordered His disciples to cross the sea, which took them straight into the middle of a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41). They were terrified, while He slept on a cushion. The storm was a test to see if they would obey His will and trust Him even when it looked bad. They were in the storm, but they had Jesus with them.

The question is, Do you trust God's will even when He puts you in the storm? If so, you'll experience His presence to calm the storm.

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PRIORITY TWO: THE PROVISION OF PRAYER

Now we're ready to address the second half of Jesus' model prayer, the verses in which we make our needs and requests known to our heavenly Father.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). One reason we are to ask our heavenly Father for our food is that we don't want the wrong person feeding us.

Did you know that the devil has a food program? He does, and he offered it to Jesus in the wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:3) just before Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, but Jesus refused because the bread would have been from the wrong source. It's more important where your daily bread comes from than whether you have enough bread.

As the Israelites were ready to enter Canaan, God warned them, "Beware that you do not

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forget the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 8:11).

Why were the Israelites in danger of forgetting God? Because they were going into a good land, and if they weren't careful they would forget that God gave it to them. Then they would start saying, "My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth" (v. 17).

We can do the same thing. We can forget God and get the big head and start saying, "Wait a minute. I'm the one making the living here. I built this company with my own hands. I'm the one making the great deals. I've earned everything I have by my own hard work and dedication."

God has a remedy for that kind of spiritual amnesia. "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

How does God give you the strength to make a living? By providing the bread you have to eat before you can even go to work. Whatever you eat comes from something God has made. Asking God for your daily bread is a great reminder of who your Provider really is.

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Jesus used bread here to represent all of our physical needs. He was saying that if we are taking care of God's priorities and concerns, we won't have to worry about our bread. If we are serving God's kingdom, the King will cover our needs.

But what we do so often is let our physical needs get ahead of our spiritual priorities, and we wind up messed up on both counts. When you make bread an end in itself, then your only concern is, "When do we eat?" You don't care too much who provided the bread.

Jesus' example in the wilderness teaches us that God is more important than our physical satisfaction. When we find our satisfaction and sustenance in Him, then the promise of Philippians 4:19 kicks in. "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Notice that Paul said "according to," not "out of." A wealthy person could give you a measly dollar out of his riches. But if he were to give you a gift according to, or in keeping with, his riches, you'd have something special coming.

Recently, I was talking to a businessman who was trying to close a million-dollar deal. He wanted me to pray with him about this deal. I said, "Before we pray, let me ask you a

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question. If this deal goes through, what does God get out of it?"

He started scratching his head and rubbing his eyes because he had not considered that before. You see, when you start praying, "Give me," and God isn't part of the deal, you've got it backwards.

God has promised to supply our needs when we are putting Him and His kingdom first (see Matthew 6:33). But there are times when He may not do that. I can think of two situations.

The first is suggested by the conversation I had with that businessman. That is, God may not meet our needs because of our carnality. Like the prodigal son, we may be in a far country eating with the pigs when God is abundantly supplying everyone's needs back home in the Father's house. When we get up and come back home, God will start meeting our needs.

Jesus emphasized the "daily-ness" of God's supply.

Another occasion when God may not meet our physical needs is when He is testing us to take us to the next spiritual level. The issue here is not whether God will meet a need, but when.

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God may have a specific purpose for not responding immediately, but David could say confidently, "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). God the Father has never walked out on His children.

This is also a selfless prayer: "Give *us* this day our daily bread." In other words, you cannot be concerned only about your needs in prayer. You can't say, "Lord, I don't care if other folk are starving. Feed me." Prayer that never gets beyond me and my needs is not something God can bless.

The provision we are taught to pray for is supplied "this day." Jesus emphasized the "daily-ness" of God's supply.

The best example of this is Israel in the wilderness. The people were hungry, so God rained down a white, flaky substance called manna (Exodus 16:13-21). Manna was bread from heaven, and God's instruction was that the Israelites were only to gather enough for each day. Anything they tried to keep overnight, except for the Sabbath, turned rancid or stale.

A lot of us are living off of stale blessings. We haven't hallowed God's name, prioritized His

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kingdom, or obeyed His will, so by the time we get to our bread, it's stale. Nobody wants stale bread. We want it to be fresh. But we can't enjoy it fresh when we are giving God our stale, leftover service.

Why does God want us to come to Him each day for our needs? Because coming keeps us thankful and dependent. When the refrigerator and freezer are full, it's easy to forget to trust God and not depend on His provision. We need this truth in our culture because most of us have tomorrow's food on hand today.

I strongly suggest that you fast once in a while as a family, just to remind you where your daily bread comes from and what it feels like not to have it. Fasting wouldn't hurt most of us, because we're an overeating generation. The issue is not just going hungry for a meal or a day. The issue is learning how dependent we are on God and reminding ourselves daily that He alone is our Source. What we say about our pets, God says about us: "Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

The Pardon of Prayer

The next request in the Lord's Prayer is also crucial.

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"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Here Jesus introduced us to the very difficult subject of forgiveness. There is probably not a person reading this page who has not struggled with forgiveness.

The issue of forgiveness is real because the problem of sin is real. When we sin, or someone sins against us, it's like a person running up a bill or accumulating a debt. There is something real that needs to be addressed.

The word *forgive* means "to hurl away." Forgiveness has to do with casting or throwing away that which has caused the problem—in this case, the sin that blocks our relationship with God and with others.

Forgiveness, then, is the decision to no longer carry an offense on the books, not to keep the offender in debt. Forgiveness means to cancel the debt and release the debtor. The opposite of this would be the refusal to let go of the debt, or to retaliate against the sinner.

Now the fact that Jesus taught His disciples to pray this way raises a theological question. This is a prayer believers are to pray. But you may say, "I thought that as a Christian, I was

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already forgiven. Why do I need to pursue forgiveness?"

The answer is that the Bible teaches two kinds of forgiveness. There is the judicial or legal forgiveness we received when we trusted Christ. In the courtroom of heaven, our sin debt was paid and our sin account was closed. When God forgave you, He took care of your sins past, present, and future, so that your sins will never come up again before God with regard to your standing before Him.

The second kind of forgiveness is relational forgiveness. This is the forgiveness we are urged to pursue in 1 John 1:9, cleansing from the effects of our sin that cause a break in our fellowship and intimacy with our heavenly Father. God doesn't deal with His children as a Judge, but as our Father. Although the legal issue of sin is settled once for all, the relational issue of sin has to be dealt with regularly.

We do this with our children. Legally, they belong to us even on their worst days. But that doesn't mean they are always in good relational standing with us. When they mess up, we forgive them and restore the closeness. In the Lord's Prayer we are asking God to remove the barrier our sins have erected

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between Him and us, and restore us to the joy of His favor.

This raises the question of the relationship between forgiving and forgetting. Does God forget our sins once He has forgiven them?

The Bible says so. God told His people, "I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25). That doesn't mean God is no longer able to recall what we did. If that were true, He could not be omniscient.

What God does is let go of our sins so they no longer count against us. A good example might be a very high bell tower with a rope attached to the bell. Forgiveness is cutting the rope.

The criterion of forgiveness is also given in Matthew 6:12: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." We must be willing to grant others what we ourselves expect from God. To ask God to forgive you when you won't forgive somebody else is to destroy the bridge over which you yourself must cross.

Evidently, forgiveness was the most important theme of the Lord's Prayer, because it's the only part of the prayer that Jesus gave further comment on: "For if you forgive others for

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their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (vv. 14-15).

One reason this is so crucial is because of what it cost God to forgive us. Giving His only Son to die for us was a very expensive provision, so He does not want us to take our responsibility to forgive lightly.

There are two ways you can forgive others. The first is to forgive unilaterally. By that I mean forgiving another person when your forgiveness has not been sought.

There are several examples of this in the Bible. As Stephen was being stoned to death, he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60).

But the greatest example of unilateral forgiveness was Jesus as He was being crucified. He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The second form of forgiveness is transactional forgiveness. This is when both parties are involved, when the offender seeks forgiveness and receives it. Transactional

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forgiveness involves an exchange, and is based on repentance.

How do you know when the person who asks for forgiveness is truly repentant? You can't see into a person's heart, but you can watch someone's actions and look for the fruit of repentance. A person who is seeking forgiveness and is truly repentant will manifest that repentance in actions that help heal the wound.

What happens when we fail to forgive others the way God has forgiven us? Jesus once told a story to illustrate the consequences of failing to forgive.

The story is in Matthew 18:21-35. You'll want to read it for yourself, since we can't quote all the verses here. But let me summarize this familiar story.

It began with a good question. Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (v. 21). Jesus' answer was "up to seventy times seven" (v. 22), and then He told the story of a king whose servants owed him some money.

The first servant owed the king the equivalent of ten to twelve million dollars, a staggering

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amount. The king ordered that he and his family be sold to pay the debt, but the slave begged for mercy. So the king forgave him the entire debt.

But this same slave went out and started choking another slave who owed him about one hundred dollars. When he couldn't pay, his cruel fellow servant had him tossed into prison.

Word of this got back to the king, and he was very angry. He called in the forgiven, but unforgiving, servant, and turned him over to the torturers until his huge debt was repaid.

This is usually understood to mean that the man was thrown into prison to be tortured until he could pay back the ten to twelve million. But I don't think that debt was the repayment issue here. Let me show you why.

First of all, how was the servant going to pay back such a huge amount of money in jail? He wouldn't even be able to work. Besides, the money had been forgiven earlier. I think the only debt the evil servant owed his king was to forgive the debt of his fellow servant who owed him a hundred dollars. Since he failed to do that, he had to suffer the negative consequences of his unforgiveness.

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I believe this is what Jesus was teaching because He said at the end, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (v. 35).

This is the same principle announced in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us as we forgive others." If we fail to forgive others, God will hold us to the same harsh standard of unforgiveness we exacted against our brother or sister. God will reject fellowship with the believer who seeks relational forgiveness and yet is unwilling to grant it. This loss of fellowship with God is seen in many believers who constantly suffer from stress, depression, and discouragement.

But the positive consequences of forgiveness are awesome. They include peace of mind, restored relationships, and vital communion with God. In fact, the apostle James said that those who extend mercy to others receive mercy from God (James 2:13).

Therefore, don't destroy the bridge of forgiveness to others that you yourself must cross.

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The Protection of Prayer

The last verse of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13) is the longest, and it's a very fitting way to end this great model prayer for Jesus' disciples. Let's take it phrase by phrase.

Jesus said we should pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This has presented a problem for many people. Why would we have to ask God not to lead us into temptation? Is that something He might do?

The point is not that God might lead us into something we shouldn't be doing and we have to pray that He won't. This is a request for divine protection in the midst of a fallen world that bombards us with evil all day every day.

From the time we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night—and even while we're sleeping—you and I are in spiritual danger. The entire system of this world and the demonic world is aligned against us. We'd better be asking our Father for protection from evil.

You need to understand that the Greek word translated "temptation" here is actually a neutral word. It can be used negatively, as in a temptation to do evil, or positively, as in a

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test the Lord sends our way to strengthen and mature us. We have to study the context to tell which meaning is in view.

If you go to the gym to lift weights and get in shape, you are under a heavy burden while you're lifting those weights. But it is a good burden because it is designed to tone and exercise your muscles. That's a positive use of weights.

But if somebody took a heavy weight and threw it at you to hurt you, that would definitely be a negative use of weights. If that weight hit you, you'd be in pain, even more than you're in pain when you're lifting. But the pain is different. It came from a different source, and had a different purpose—one to develop you and the other to harm you.

That's the difference between God's trials and the devil's temptations. God wants to develop us. Satan throws evil at us to destroy us. And the interesting thing is that sometimes the same event can be used by God for good and by the devil for evil (see Joseph's statement to his brothers in Genesis 50:20).

This is broken out quite nicely for us in James 1, where James used the same word Jesus used in both of its meanings. First we see God's use of trials or tests to produce spiritual

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endurance in us and make us "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

This is why Jesus told us to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done." When you are committed to God's kingdom program, He can bring a tough circumstance, a real trial, across your path without your fretting about what you have done wrong or wondering why in the world you should have to endure something hard.

Instead, you know this is a trial to develop you because you know that "the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:3). How do you know that? By faith. How do you get that kind of understanding? You ask God for it (v. 5).

You may be going through a big-time test right now. Let me give you some good news. The harder the test, the greater the spiritual growth. So if you are in a fire right now, you're getting ready for a hot blessing!

This is the positive use of trials. But James used this same word negatively when he said, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

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James went on to say that if you are tempted and fall into sin, you do so on your own with an assist from the devil. These are the temptations from which we need God's protection so we don't fall into sin.

Understanding this should take some of the pressure off of us, because a lot of us are feeling guilty for the wrong thing. We feel guilty because our flesh wants to do wrong. We tell the flesh to stop feeling that way, but it doesn't work.

I have news for you. Your flesh, that old human nature still within you as a leftover from Adam, will always want to do wrong. It is corrupt, and it always will be until you die and your body becomes worm food. Paul said, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Romans 7:18).

So don't feel bad when your flesh wants to do wrong. Remember that your old nature is not you. You've been given a new nature by Jesus Christ. Your flesh is merely the sin-contaminated tent that your new nature lives in temporarily.

Don't misunderstand. This does not mean we can indulge our flesh in sin on the excuse that we can't help it and our flesh isn't the real us anyway. Oh, no. We are under obligation to

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control and conquer our fleshly desires, and we can do that because we have the superabundant power of God available to us in the Holy Spirit.

The process of God's protection is described in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Paul wrote, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

I like that word *overtaken* because it means you are minding your own business, not out looking for trouble, when a temptation crosses your path. When that happens, you need to understand that God is faithful. You can count on Him to respond when you are tempted.

That means even the attacks of Satan that come your way are controlled by God. He only lets a certain number get through, and it's never more than you can bear.

Not only will God limit the extent of the temptation, He will provide an escape route. Notice the two little words "with" and "also" at the end of this verse. God will provide the escape route at the same time He allows the trial. The escape comes along with the

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temptation. They both show up at the same time.

This is important to understand because we are not in the habit of looking for the exit when we are being tempted. But if Satan puts you in a box, God cuts a hole in the box.

By the way, this same principle works even if we understand 1 Corinthians 10:13 to be talking about God-sent trials instead of the devil's temptations. No matter how hard or painful the trial, God promises that He will not allow it to take you under.

Of course, we would like this promise to say that God will provide us with an escape route so we can avoid trials altogether. But that's not the way the Christian life works.

So if you're being bombarded by temptation, pray that God will deliver you from evil. Ask Him to show you the way out, because it's there. And if you can't see the way out, ask God for the wisdom to find it (James 1:5).

When you pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil," you are saying, "Father, You know what I can handle today. Only give me what I can bear, and that which is going to help me. And deliver me from the Evil One."

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The ultimate purpose of prayer is to praise and glorify the Lord.

Why should we pray for protection? Because we need it desperately, and because God is a delivering God. He delivered Esther and the Jewish people from annihilation in Persia. He delivered Daniel from the lion's den and Peter from prison. And even though Stephen was stoned to death, he looked up and saw heaven opened and Jesus waiting to receive him.

Even when it's time to die, God delivers you. The thief on the cross next to Jesus was in the worst shape possible, but Jesus promised him heaven that very day.

We pray for protection because God loves to deliver His people, so that His people may honor Him.

The Purpose of Prayer

We have come to the final section of the prayer Jesus gave us to teach us how to pray. The last request in the Lord's Prayer is "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:13).

Jesus teaches that when you finish praying, you are to offer God a doxology. The ultimate

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purpose of prayer is to praise and glorify the Lord.

Doxology is made up of two words that mean to praise and to speak or utter. So a doxology is an utterance of praise. But it's different from ordinary praise. A doxology is the kind of praise that erupts when a basketball player sinks the winning shot with one-tenth of a second left on the clock. Those points don't count any more than any of the other points in the game, but they're different from all those other points.

David broke out in praise at the offerings given for the building of the temple. As he contemplated the glory and greatness of God, David said,

"Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all." (1 Chronicles 29:10-11)

David was so overwhelmed with the presence of God that he couldn't keep it to himself. Something is wrong with the Christian who always holds it in and tries to keep the praise under wraps all the time. Every now and

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again, you need to let it out when the glory and the greatness and the marvel of God overwhelms you.

I love the way Paul let it all out in Romans 11:33-36. After talking about the glorious plan and program of God, Paul couldn't restrain his praise any longer, and he broke out in a doxology that begins, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (v. 33).

Sometimes we are too sophisticated and inhibited in our worship. I'm not suggesting we lose our dignity or sense of decorum. But when the glory of God erupts in our souls, we need to let it out in spontaneous, exuberant praise to Him. A doxology is like a volcano erupting when the pressure from within becomes too great to contain.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives us four things that a doxology will express about God and to God. I need to point out that it's dangerous to exegete a doxology, because that's not its purpose. But with that word of caution, let's take these last four glorious concepts one by one.

First, Jesus taught us to pray, "Yours is the kingdom" (Matthew 6:13). This is a

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declaration that every other kingdom will fall when it faces the kingdom of God.

Not too long ago, a sale of Elvis Presley memorabilia brought in more than five million dollars. Presley was called "the king," but that king is dead. His kingdom is now a museum. Our King is alive! Jesus Christ sits on the throne of heaven, and His kingdom will rule forever and ever. Our King is not for sale.

A second fact about our King and His kingdom that ought to elicit a doxology is His power. "Yours is the kingdom and the *power*" (italics added). God is not an impotent King. He can perform whatever He desires for the good of His kingdom.

God's kingdom is always matched by God's power, which is unlimited and self-generating. Paul said it best in the doxology of Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Here's a third reason for praise. "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the *glory*" (italics added). The word *glory* means to be weighty or heavy. We used to say in the 1960s, "That

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dude is heavy." We meant the person was important in some way, someone worth paying attention to.

That's what glory means. When we give God glory, we are assigning to Him the significance that is due Him. God's glory is so surpassingly great that nothing else in the universe can compare to it.

If anything should call forth a doxology from you and me, it is God's glory. His glory was made visible in the Old Testament in the "shekinah" (see Ezekiel 43:1-5). God's invisible glory is made visible to us in another way when God suddenly moves in our lives and makes a way where there is no way.

Paul offered another doxology when he was discussing the greatness of God and the return of Jesus Christ. The apostle referred to the Lord as "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be glory and eternal dominion! Amen" (1 Timothy 6:15-16). "Unapproachable light" means God is brighter than the sun. We can't even approach the sun without getting cooked, yet the God who

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created the sun is infinitely brighter than the sun.

That's why God had to become a man to live among us. Jesus' glory had to be covered. What made the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9) so awesome and frightening for the disciples was that Jesus' humanity was opened for a moment and they saw the brilliant glory of deity.

The fourth concept Jesus gave us at the close of the Lord's Prayer is *forever*. We ought to praise God for His eternity. He has no beginning and no end.

Now if you think about this for too long and try to figure it out, you'll go mad. There has never been a time God has not been. That's why the best thing we can do is praise Him that He lives forever and that His kingdom will rule forever.

And don't miss the last word of the prayer, the *amen*. That's not just a nice word to tell everyone the prayer is over and they can raise their heads and relax. Amen means "Let it be, Lord. I agree with You. So be it. Even so, come Lord Jesus."

This is what it means to pray. We've covered a lot of ground and discussed a lot of crucial

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ideas. It's hard to adequately sum up a prayer like this in a few words, but let me try. Here's an "Evans paraphrase" of what we are saying to God when we pray as Jesus taught us to pray:

Lord, I acknowledge and bow before You, recognizing that You are my Father and the Father of all who believe. I know You live in heaven, and I want to give You the Honor You are due by hallowing Your name in everything I think, say, and do.

And because You are my heavenly Father, I will restructure my priorities so that I live for Your kingdom program, not my agenda. Let me get out my calendar and redo my schedule so that I can do Your will and not mine.

And Father, because I know who You are and where You live and how important Your kingdom program is, and because I have committed myself to live totally for Your kingdom and glory I have several requests to make of You.

First, Lord, please give me the daily nutrients I need to have the energy to hallow Your name, serve Your kingdom, and do Your will.

And as I seek to hallow Your name, serve Your kingdom, and do Your will, forgive me for

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anything I've done to offend or fail You, even as You see that I have forgiven others who have done anything against me. Lord, I know that if I don't forgive others, You won't forgive me and my fellowship with You will be broken. Then You won't accept my praise and service.

Also, Father, as I go out to serve You today, don't let me get into something I can't handle. Don't give me a

trial I can't deal with, because if I get into anything I can't deal with I'm going to embarrass Your name and Your kingdom.

And Lord, as I come to the end of my prayer, I want You to know that I understand this is not about me. I want You to know that I am so excited about worshiping Your Person, serving Your kingdom program, and accomplishing Your will on earth that I just can't contain my praise any longer.

Praise You for Your kingdom, which rules over all! Praise You for Your marvelous, incomparable power! Praise You for Your transcendent glory, which far outshines the sun! And praise You that it will be this way forever!

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My friend, when you learn to pray like this and mean it, you are going to see heaven respond and earth shake. When you learn to pray like this, you are going to experience the power and glory and presence of God as never before.

The disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus did that, and now it is our privilege and lifelong challenge to learn to pray as Jesus has taught us to pray. Let our prayer also be, "Lord, teach us to pray." And then, let us pray!

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SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Remember that old newsreel that shows President Franklin Roosevelt addressing Congress the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941?

Talking about "a day that will live in infamy," the president declared that in reality, America was already at war. Roosevelt just needed a declaration of Congress to make it official.

I am not the president, but I have a declaration to make: You and I are at war! In fact, we are engaged right now in the mother of all battles. No war in history can compare with the battle you and I are fighting. It can be the cause of either your greatest joy as a Christian or your deepest pain.

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THE AGENDA IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The war I am talking about is the spiritual warfare that you became a part of the day you received Jesus Christ as your Savior. This war affects every area of your life. There is no way you can avoid the conflict. There is no bunker or foxhole you can crawl into that will shield you from the effects of this cosmic battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan.

You may not even know you're at war. A lot of Christians don't. But other people can see the results of the battle in those people's lives, because they have become casualties of spiritual warfare.

Some Christians are emotional casualties of spiritual warfare. They are discouraged, depressed, downtrodden, and defeated. Others are marital and family casualties. Divorce, conflict, and abuse are some of the battle scars" these believers bear."

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Still others have been wounded morally in the battle. They cannot control their passions, or they make poor moral choices. For some Christians, the wounds have been inflicted on their finances. They are losing the financial battle because they are losing the spiritual battle. It's not just a matter of how they use their credit cards.

Since we are all at war, and since there is so much at stake both here on earth and in eternity, we'd better find out what spiritual warfare is all about and how to fight the battle successfully. That's what I want to help you do in this book.

The Essence of the Battle

Let me begin by stating the obvious. The essence of our warfare is spiritual. Because of this, the degree to which we will be successful is the degree to which we are prepared to understand and fight this battle on a spiritual level.

Perhaps a definition will help at this point. Spiritual warfare is that conflict being waged in the invisible, spiritual realm that is being manifest in the visible, physical realm.

In other words, spiritual warfare is a battle between invisible, angelic forces that affects

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you and me. The cause of the war is something you and I can't see. But the effects are very visible in the kinds of problems I mentioned above, and in the day-to-day stuff you and I face all the time.

It's hard enough to fight an enemy you can see. It's much harder to fight someone you can't see. That is exactly the kind of enemy we face. Paul wrote, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

This verse identifies the enemy: Satan and his demons. That means we are making a grand mistake if we think people are the real enemy. People can be bad, no doubt. But they are merely conduits for this greater battle. Satan has been very successful in getting us to fight people, rather than fighting that which is causing people to be the way they are.

Let me set down a foundational principle for spiritual warfare. Everything we see in the physical realm is either caused, influenced, or provoked by something in the spiritual realm. Your five senses are not the limit of reality.

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Daniel 4:32 states that heaven rules over all the affairs of earth. So until we address the spiritual cause of a problem, we will never fix the physical effect of that problem.

Not only are our physical senses very limited, but they are often of little help in spiritual warfare. If we are going to wage successful spiritual battle, we need a "sixth sense"—a keen awareness of the spiritual realm. In order to understand spiritual warfare, we have to address it through the lens of the spirit, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Impact of the Battle

Even though this battle is spiritual, it has very definite effects in the physical realm. You know you're in a battle when you get shot and start bleeding. We are seeing the "bleeding," the impact, of spiritual warfare in at least four areas of life today.

Many believers are seeing the wounds of spiritual warfare in their personal lives. This doesn't mean these people are necessarily doing something really bad. It could be that they have a problem such as uncontrolled anger.

Our emotions can give the devil an entry into our lives. Paul explained the relationship

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between our emotions and spiritual warfare: "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity" (Ephesians 4:25-27).

Failing to control anger grants the devil an opportunity to get a foothold in your life. Then he can use it as a base of operation to launch more spiritual attacks against you.

Many Christians are suffering today because of anger that was not resolved yesterday—and anger is just one of a complex range of human emotions. If Satan can seize our emotions, he can destroy our ability to function by crippling us emotionally or leading us into all manner of destructive and addictive behavior.

Many believers are also feeling the effects of spiritual warfare in their families. The devil messed up the first family in the Garden of Eden, and we have been dealing with the effects of that sin ever since.

Here's a specific example of family relationships and spiritual warfare. Paul wrote to husbands and wives in 1 Corinthians 7:5, "Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote

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yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Paul is saying that when a husband and wife don't have a fulfilling sexual relationship, the devil sees that lack as an opportunity to come in and bring about moral destruction in the family. So this thing of spiritual warfare gets right down to the nitty-gritty aspects of everyday life.

The Location of the Battle

Where in the universe is this great battle called spiritual warfare being fought? Paul tells us it is "in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The third heaven is the throne room of God, the place we normally think of when we hear the word *heaven*. The Bible has the most to say about this heaven. In fact, heaven is a very busy place, the sphere of God's operation.

In the book of Ephesians alone, we find numerous references to heavenly places in addition to the one above. I want to review these with you, because understanding how to tap into the heavenly places is crucial to spiritual warfare.

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Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." God resides in the heavenly places, and so do *all* of our spiritual blessings.

This is important because if you are engaged in a spiritual battle and need help to win, the help you need is with God the Father, who is in the heavenly places. But if you don't know how to get to heavenly places, you won't know how to get to the heavenly help you need to win the battle in earthly places.

According to Ephesians 1:20, when God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He seated His Son "at His right hand in the heavenly places." Not only are the Father and your blessings in heavenly places, Jesus Christ is there too. So if you need Christ's help in earthly places, you'd better know where He is hanging out and how to take a trip there to obtain His help in your warfare.

But it gets even better. God also "raised us up with [Christ], and seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). Do you get the picture here? You and I as believers are also in heavenly places.

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You may say, "Wait a minute, I'm here on earth. I'm in a physical place." But that's a problem. If you only see where you are physically and never understand where you're supposed to be spiritually, you'll never be able to win in spiritual warfare.

Satan is a limited being.

Paul is saying that when you accepted Christ, you were transported to another sphere. Even though your body is limited to earth, your spirit that should be controlling your body is operating in a wholly different realm.

What else is in heavenly places? Spiritual rulers and authorities (see Ephesians 3:10). These are angels. This is important for spiritual warfare, because it takes an angel to beat an angel. Remember, Satan and his demons are also "in the heavenly places" (6:12).

See, if your problem originates in the heavenly places, you need a solution that originates in the heavenly places. Most of us have very little consciousness of angels because they're not part of our physical world. But we need to understand that the angels of God and the demons of hell are the "foot soldiers" in the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

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When you hear believers say they are being attacked by the devil, they probably mean they are being harassed by his foot soldiers. Satan is a limited being. He is not everywhere present, all-knowing, and all-powerful like God.

But Satan does have a whole host of evil angels called demons he can use for spiritual attacks. So anything that hell can bring against you is the result of satanic activity in the same realm in which God operates, called heavenly places.

You and I are no match for the power and deceptiveness of Satan and his army. We need the power of God to neutralize and destroy the power of Satan.

But if you need divine help and don't yet have a "heavenly places" mind-set, you won't know how to get the help you need at the time you need it. Since everything related to our warfare is in the spiritual realm, we need to know how to reach into the heavenly places for help. That's where the action is.

The good news is, you can take a trip to heaven any time you feel like it—because spiritually, you're already there. You are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

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Some years ago, my wife Lois and I were in Lon-don, England, staying at a hotel that was one block from the American embassy. Embassies are sovereign territories, belonging to the country they represent.

The American embassy is a little piece of America on foreign soil. So if you are an American citizen in a foreign country and you need help or protection, you go to the American embassy.

That's what "heavenly places" means. It's the embassy of heaven on foreign soil. It's the place where you can make contact with your homeland.

The Bible says that we are aliens on earth, just passing through on our way to heaven. God wants us to use our visa while we are here, but live like people who belong to another realm.

We can be thankful that God has established His "embassy" in heavenly places, because there's a war on out there. The kingdom of darkness has its own king, Satan, and he wants to be in charge of the universe.

However, there is no question that the kingdom of God and His King, Jesus Christ, are firmly in charge. Jesus' eternal victory is

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already assured. But God has allowed us to choose in our individual lives who will be in charge.

Those of us who have decided for Christ will live eternally with Him. But while we're here on earth, we still need to decide for Christ each day in terms of our spiritual warfare.

The Forces in the Battle

As I said before, this is angelic conflict. The archangel Michael and the holy angels are fighting Satan and the angels who rebelled with him, as described in Revelation 12:7-12.

This war in heaven directly affects what is happening on earth. We are in the midst of an angelic conflict, a satanic rebellion, in which Satan is seeking to bring this whole world under his domain. That means when you were born into the kingdom of God, you were born into a war.

We are surrounded by our spiritual enemy, but the battle is not for land or anything physical. This cosmic battle is for *glory*. The issue is, Who is going to get the glory in this universe? Who is going to be worshiped?

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Satan has said to God, "You cannot have all the glory in creation. I want the glory for myself."

God's response was, "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 48:11).

Satan said, "You are going to share Your glory with me. Let's go to war." The battle is for the throne of creation. Praise God the outcome has never been in doubt, but the battle goes on every day in our lives as to who will get the glory by what we do.

That's why Paul told us, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31; see also Colossians 3:23). This is the essence of the battle.

I don't know where you are in your Christian life, so I don't know where you stand in relation to the reality of spiritual warfare. You may not realize the Christian life is a war. Or you may know there's a war on, and you have the battle scars to prove it. You may have been tasting defeat at the hands of Satan.

Paul said in Colossians 1:13 that everyone who comes to Jesus Christ for salvation is delivered from the domain of the devil. When you received Jesus as your Savior and Lord, God set you free.

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You may be wondering, "If God set me free, why am I still in bondage to the devil in my daily life? If I'm on the winning side, why am I losing so often?"

There can be a number of answers to that question, but many believers are suffering defeat in spiritual warfare because they are trying to fight Satan in their own strength.

I have news for you. Satan isn't afraid of you at all! He's not afraid of me either. But he cannot stand up against God for even a second.

This is why Paul wrote, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11). It is when God fights the battle for you, not when *you* fight the battle for you, that you win against the Evil One.

Lack of victory in the spiritual battle reflects a lack of understanding of our divine resources. Every Christian has problems, but it's the inability to move beyond the problem, the inability to get past the failure, that keeps us in spiritual defeat. Victory is found in dependence on God, so Satan's plan is to detach us from dependence on God.

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Since we're talking about our enemy in this cosmic struggle called spiritual warfare, let's look at Satan and his strategy in more detail so we'll know who and what we're up against.

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THE ADVERSARY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The story is told of a farmer who was constantly having his watermelons stolen by thieves.

So the farmer came up with a brilliant idea to thwart the thieves. He poisoned one watermelon, then put a sign in his watermelon field that read: "Warning: one of these watermelons has been poisoned."

The next day the farmer went out to find that none of his melons had been stolen, because the thieves didn't know which one was poisoned. He was quite satisfied that his idea had worked and that he would not have a problem with theft anymore.

But the day after that, the farmer came out to his field to find that someone had scratched through his sign and had changed the wording to say, "Two of these watermelons have been poisoned." The farmer had to destroy his

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whole crop because now he didn't know which other melon was poisoned.

That's what it is like to deal with the devil. No matter what you come up with, he can come up with something better. No matter what sign you put up, he can change the wording. No matter what strategy you devise, you can't outwit this fellow.

Satan has a definite strategy, and it can be understood in one word: deception. Satan's strategy for your life and mine is to deceive us. He is the master deceiver. He is the camouflage king.

The reason Satan has turned to deception is that he cannot "outpower" God. Satan tried to overcome God in heaven, and that gamble failed. Satan's power will never be a match for God's.

Evidently, in his rebellion Satan forgot that God can do something he cannot do, which is create something out of nothing by simply speaking it into existence.

Satan cannot create anything. All he can do is manipulate and maneuver what has been created. Since he cannot match God's power, Satan has to maximize the power he has, and

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deception is his strong suit. He has turned deception into an art form.

The Power of Satan's Strategy

That Satan is no match for God doesn't mean he is powerless. In fact, I want to begin the discussion of Satan's strategy by looking at the power of his deception.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul was correcting these believers' misconceptions about the Day of the Lord:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (vv. 3-4)

Paul then said that this "lawless one," the Antichrist, will not appear until God's restraint is removed. Then, "that lawless one will be revealed... the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" (vv. 8-10).

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The appearance of the Antichrist will be Satan's crowning achievement in his plan to deceive the world. The Antichrist will be empowered by Satan, who will give this person great power to pull off the master deception—masquerading as God.

But we don't have to wait until the end times to see the power of Satan at work. How else can you explain the fact that people will give up everything they have to move in with a cult and put themselves under someone else's power, even to the point of committing suicide in the name of God? The only explanation is Satan's deception.

Where does Satan get the power he wields over people? He gets it from what I call his constitutional superiority over any man or woman. By this I mean that Satan is an angel, a spirit being. He does not have the limitations of flesh and blood.

Therefore, you and I can't compete with the devil in our own strength. We can't outsmart the master deceiver. He has authority by virtue of his person. Satan's authority is given by God and limited by God, but it is still a greater authority than you and I exercise.

Satan is also powerful by virtue of his vast experience. He has untold years of experience

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at being the devil. You are not the first human being he has come up against. He has been against smarter and stronger people than you and me, and he has won.

One thing Satan has learned during all these years is how to make himself look like one of the good guys (see 2 Corinthians 11:14). He is the master chameleon. He can become any color he needs to be in order to camouflage himself and his plans.

Satan is so experienced at deception that the Bible says one day he will deceive all the nations of the world (Revelation 20:8). This world is a puppet, and Satan holds the strings.

Another reason that Satan is so powerful in carrying out his strategy is that he commands a massive organization of evil (Ephesians 6:12). Satan's organization is well run and heavily disguised.

It reminds me of the Mafia. Do you know the address of Mafia headquarters? Can you pick out members of the Mafia as they walk the streets? The Mafia has camouflaged itself. Its members operate legitimate-looking businesses behind which they hide their crimes. We know that they are out there and that they are powerful, but they're hard to identify.

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Satan heads a spiritual Mafia that controls people and even nations. People wonder how a nation can produce a Stalin or a Hitler. The explanation is the massive work and deception of Satan. That's how powerful he is.

The Program of Satan's Strategy

Let's consider Satan's program. What is he hoping to achieve by his strategy of deception?

Satan's program is to produce such a wonderful counterfeit of God's works and ways that he leads us astray. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Notice that Paul's illustration of Satan's deception is Eve, which takes us back to Genesis 3. Satan hasn't changed his program since the Garden of Eden when he led Eve astray.

Satan is a counterfeiter—and the better the counterfeiter, the fewer the number of people who realize they're carrying counterfeit money. In fact, you can buy groceries and gas and furniture with counterfeit money. The problem is when those bills hit the bank and are shown to be worthless.

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You'll remember that Satan told Eve she could be like God. He knew that was a counterfeit promise because he had tried that himself. But he's still out there tempting us to take things into our own hands, to set up our own kingdoms, to try to live independently of God. The devil wants you to believe that you don't have to answer to God anymore.

But that's a myth. This universe is God's house, and He's just letting us live in a borrowed room for a while. At one time or another, most parents have to have an "ownership" discussion with their teenagers. It works like this. A teenager is being rebellious or whatever, so he gets mad, goes to his room, and cranks up the music because he doesn't want to hear what you're saying. So you confront his rebellion and tell him to turn the music down. He responds, "I can do whatever I want in here. This is *my* room."

Wrong. This is where you bring out your homeowner papers and inform your child that since you are paying for the house it belongs to you, not to him. He is simply occupying a room that you let him sleep in.

If he wants his own room, he needs to buy his own house and furniture. Then he can have any room he wants. But until then, it's your

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room on loan to him, and you as the parent call the shots.

There's a big difference between being the owner of the house and a guest in the house. To me, one of the absolutely foundational verses in Scripture is Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

Everything you and I have belongs to God. And the moment we say, "It's mine," in the sense of ownership as opposed to stewardship, what we've done is insult God by saying, "I want to be like the Most High."

Satan also told Eve, "If you eat of this tree, you will know good and evil." In other words, you can make your own decisions about what's right and wrong. You don't need God's ideas of morality.

Satan also told Eve, "You won't die if you eat from this tree. God was lying to you." In other words, there are no consequences to your actions. You can do whatever you want without suffering any penalties. God won't do anything about it.

But the death God warned Adam and Eve about did come to pass. They lost their innocence, their relationship with Him, and

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their home in the garden. And physical death followed as the inevitable consequence of their spiritual death.

Whatever label you give to Satan's deception, the basis is the same. Satan hates truth, and he'll try to lead people astray from it every time.

He even has his own fake form of Christianity. He has phony doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1), can produce phony miracles, and has a counterfeit communion table. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21). He also has a fake gospel and spirituality (Galatians 1:11; 3:2-3).

And to propagate his program, the devil has his own false teachers. Paul warned the church at Corinth of men who were "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13).

The Process of Satan's Strategy

We've seen that Satan's strategy is powerful and purposeful. Now we need to talk about the process of his deception, how it actually works.

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The apostle James outlined the process by which Satan deceives people. It begins with the desire: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (James 1:13-14).

Stage one in Satan's plan is the arousal of a desire.

We have many legitimate desires. But these desires become a problem when Satan tempts us to meet a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way.

Satan knows you can't just skip the desire, because desires are God-given. So the enemy wants to control how your desires are met. This is the issue in temptation. Satan wants your desires to master you, rather than you mastering your desires.

In stage two of the process, the sinful growth of a desire leads to deception, the moment the person takes Satan's bait and finds out he has been deceived.

Satan is a smart fisherman. He's not just throwing bare hooks out in front of us. He doesn't say to a man, "Come on down to the

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local bar and let me get you addicted to alcohol so you can lose your job and your family, lose your self-respect and self-control, and wind up in a rehab center."

Satan is far too smart to let his hooks show. He covers them with enticing bait. Satan deceives us by planting the evil thought or idea in our minds. He can't make us do anything, but he can build deceitful castles of desire in our minds.

Desire leads to deception, and then deception leads to disobedience, which is stage three of the process. "When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:15).

James used the analogy of conception, pregnancy, and birth because the birth process so closely parallels the temptation process. When a temptation is welcomed and acted upon, that act of conception produces a "child" called sin. And once a child has been conceived, its birth is sure to follow.

In other words, committing disobedience is like the act of procreation. The result always shows up after a while. And like any other child, sin will begin to grow once it has been born.

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Let me tell you why sin is a child you don't want to have. Children operate by their feelings. All children know is, "I want this. I want that. Give me this. Give me that." Sin will keep you living by your feelings, and when you live by feelings you do things based on how they make you feel, not whether they are right or wrong.

Don't ever think you have it better with Satan than you do with God.

God wants us to live like mature adults, people who make decisions based on their will, not their feelings. You may not feel like getting up and going to work every morning, but you get up and go anyway because it's your responsibility and you are acting on your will. Your maturity overrides your feelings of the moment.

Part of becoming mature in Christ is learning to submit our feelings to our will, to operate on the basis of what we know to be true rather than just what we feel. But sin will keep us spiritually immature, a slave to our emotions.

The fourth and final stage in Satan's process is death. James said, "When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15).

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Sin certainly brings spiritual death. That is one of the fundamental truths we learn from the sin of Adam and Eve. Sin can also produce physical death in some cases.

Satan brings death and destruction with him, but God is the source of "every perfect gift" (James 1:17). So James said, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (v. 16). When Satan deceives and leads us into sin, he causes us to miss the goodness of God. Don't ever think you have it better with Satan than you do with God. Satan's road leads to death if we follow it.

The Purpose of Satan's Strategy

Now that we know the process Satan wants to take us through, we are ready to talk about the purpose behind his strategy. Satan has several major purposes behind his deceptions.

For believers, one of Satan's purposes is to interrupt the process by which God gets glory through our lives. He wants to render us ineffective in terms of any real impact for Christ.

That's why he keeps some believers depressed, some discouraged, and others underneath their circumstances. He wants you there because he knows you can do nothing

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for God if you're miserable. God won't get glory if you're too miserable to give it to Him.

In fact, Satan can twist things so much that he'll get you blaming God for your misery. And if you're not careful, the devil can wind up using you to bring unhappiness and misery to others.

The devil also wants to deflect you and me from doing the will of God by frustrating God's will for our lives. Satan even tried to frustrate the accomplishment of God's will in Jesus' life. Satan didn't know God's will for His Son was the cross, but in the wilderness the devil tempted Jesus to take the easy way.

Satan also used one of Jesus' own disciples to try to turn Him away from following His Father's will (Matthew 16:21 -22). Imagine Peter rebuking Jesus, trying to tell Him where He was wrong. Only Satan could have thought of an attack this bold. Jesus knew who was behind it, because He told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23). The devil didn't understand why Jesus came to earth, but he was trying to frustrate God's plan. Peter was agreeing with the devil's plan. He was thinking and speaking out of two sides of his mind. He was a double-minded man.

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Jesus was saying, "Get behind Me, devil. I have to go to the cross. Peter, Satan is using you, one of My children, to stop Me from doing My Father's will."

If Satan wasn't afraid to try and turn Jesus away from God's will, do you think he will leave us alone? Of course not.

As a matter of fact, Jesus went on to say in this same passage, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Satan tried to get Jesus to focus on the suffering of the cross instead of the glory of the resurrection. Our enemy will do the same to us.

Let's face it. The cross does involve suffering. It's an instrument of death. Bearing my cross means I am willing to identify publicly with Jesus Christ and accept anything that goes with that identification. It means I will bear the scars of being identified with Christ. But the cross is also the path to resurrection glory.

The Historical Defeat of Satan

Satan is powerful and purposeful and deceptive, but he's also a defeated foe. I want to close this section of our study on spiritual warfare by talking about Satan's historical

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defeat at the cross and his eternal defeat at the end of time.

Looking ahead to the cross, Jesus said, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:31-32). The cross was the ultimate defeat that Satan did not anticipate.

When Jesus Christ was on earth, He let the devil know there was one Man he couldn't mess with. Jesus tied up the "strong man," the devil, so He could plunder the devil's house (Matthew 12:29). Jesus had total control over Satan's demons. They had to do what He said, because He was and is infinitely stronger than the devil.

But it was in His death that Jesus really crushed the head of Satan. Satan was judged at the cross (John 12:31; 16:7-11), because on the cross God removed the curse of sin that Satan caused to be laid on mankind in the Garden of Eden.

Satan was banking on a fact that he knew about God because he had experienced it himself. The fact is this: When you sin, you come under God's curse. There is nowhere to run from it. The Bible says that anyone who

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does not keep God's law perfectly is under a curse (Galatians 3:10).

Sin is the failure to keep God's law. It is a falling short of His perfect standard. The reason people will spend eternity in hell is that when they sin, they fall under the curse of God's broken law. If that failure is not addressed in Christ, eternal judgment must follow.

But Jesus removed the curse of sin, which was the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). Law becomes a curse when Satan uses it to trip us up. You see, if he can't lead us into a life of sin, he will tempt us to go the other direction, that of trying to please God by our goodness. Satan doesn't care how we arrive in hell, just so we get there.

Satan has a lot of people believing they are good enough to keep God's law and earn their way into heaven. But since no one except Christ has ever kept God's law, all those who try to follow it break it and come under His curse. Satan loves to put people under the same curse he is under. But on the cross Jesus lifted the curse. The Cross turned what was our judgment into our blessing.

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The Eternal Defeat of Satan

Satan was not only defeated in history at the cross. He will be defeated in the future, which is already as good as done from God's viewpoint.

When Satan's eternal sentence is executed, our enemy will be put away forever. He will be banished to hell for eternity as God carries out the final stage of Satan's judgment.

In Revelation 12:7-12 we see the final war in which Satan will be "thrown down" (v. 9). No wonder this elicits great rejoicing on the part of God's saints. Finally, Satan will no longer have even temporary access to heaven.

The last we hear of Satan is in Revelation 20:7-10, which describes the devil's confinement during the millennial reign of Christ, his last gasp of rebellion, and his eternal judgment.

At the end of the Millennium, those who didn't want Jesus to rule over them will get a final opportunity to rebel. Satan will be released to bring out the rebellion that they harbored in their hearts for the thousand years in which Christ reigned.

But the battle will be over quickly, because fire will come down from God and devour them

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(v. 9). And then will come the moment that God's people have been waiting for: "The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (v. 10).

Satan's judgment was pronounced in heaven in eternity past, and in Revelation 20 we hear the "thunderclap" that follows the lightning as he is thrown into the lake of fire. There is no question about Satan's final defeat and eternal destiny. He was beaten the moment he rebelled against God in heaven.

OUR AUTHORITY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Now that we know something about the agenda of the battle and the adversary we're up against, I want to show you the authority we have in Christ to wage spiritual warfare.

To do that, we are going to unfold Ephesians 6:10-17, one of *the* foundational passages on spiritual warfare in God's Word. Let's talk

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about the nature of the armor, the need for the armor, and the names of the armor.

The Nature of Our Armor

The apostle Paul doesn't waste any time in spelling out the nature of the authority we have for spiritual warfare. It's "the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11).

But before Paul gets to the armor, he gives us an important exhortation: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (v. 10).

This says the battle is the Lord's, not ours. It is a passive command. That means God supplies the strength, not us. Our job is to "dress for success" by putting on the armor God supplies.

Six pieces of spiritual armor are named in Ephesians 6, and they are divided into two kinds by the use of two verbs. For the first three pieces of armor, Paul used the verb translated "having" along with another word (see vv. 14-15). But we are told to "take" the final three pieces of armor (vv. 16-17).

The difference is that the first three pieces of armor are things we have already put on. The idea is that we are to wear these pieces all the time, the way we put on our clothes every

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morning. But the other armor pieces, like the sword and the shield, we pick up as we need them, like a baseball player who picks up his bat when it's his turn to bat.

I want you to see this distinction because it helps us understand how to use the armor God has given us.

The Need for Our Armor

The reason you and I need God's armor is that we are fighting a spiritual enemy (Ephesians 6:12). Let's talk about our need for the armor of God as Paul explained it here. He wrote, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (v. 11).

The key phrase here is "stand firm," which Paul repeated in verses 13 and 14. We need to put on our armor because of our enemy, because of Christ's victory, and because of the coming "evil day" (v. 13).

We have already talked in detail about the enemy. So let's move to the second reason we need God's armor. This is because of the nature of the victory Christ has won for us. Let me explain.

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As we said earlier, Paul told us three times that our goal is to stand firm. That means to hold the ground Jesus has already won for us. Despite what you may have heard from some television preachers, the Bible doesn't tell us to attack Satan. It tells us to stand firm against him.

Why? Because Jesus has already invaded Satan's domain and won back all the territory Adam lost. So our job is to hold the ground Jesus has won, not to fight to win. We are fighting *from* a position of victory, not *for* victory.

Ephesians 1:3 says God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing it was possible to give us. Everything God is ever going to do for you in terms of giving you His power and authority and victory, He has already done. Your spiritual victory has already been won. Your weapons are weapons of authority because of the decisive victory Jesus has won.

A third reason we need our armor is because of "the evil day" (Ephesians 6:13). One translation calls it the time "when things are at their worst" (neb). It's the time when all hell breaks loose and comes against you.

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Are you having it pretty easy right now? Enjoy it, because an evil day is coming. That's not pessimism, just reality.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13 Paul wrote, "Stand firm in the faith." That's the key. We can stand firm if our faith is in the One who provides us with the armor. God wants us to hold our ground and not budge when the evil day comes.

The Names of the Armor

Let's take a brief look at each piece of the armor God has provided for us. These are weapons you must know how to wear and wield to make the most of your spiritual authority in Christ.

The first piece of armor Paul named is the belt of truth. "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth" (Ephesians 6:14a).

Our spiritual armor is patterned after the armor and weapons of a Roman soldier of the day. For instance, these soldiers wore a long tunic that flowed down to the ground. But when it came time to fight, the soldier would pick up his tunic and tuck it into his belt for mobility in battle.

A Roman soldier also carried his sword on his belt, and his breastplate connected to the belt

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too. The belt was fundamental, because everything else connected to it. It held everything together.

That's what the truth is designed to do for us spiritually. The truth is an objective standard of reality that stands outside of our experience and stands above our opinions. That standard of truth is the Word of God. It is the beginning point of authority.

The second piece of armor is also found in Ephesians 6:14. "Stand firm therefore... having put on the breastplate of righteousness."

The Roman soldier's breastplate protected his heart. What is the best protection for your heart in spiritual warfare? To be covered in Christ's righteousness, reflected in a righteous lifestyle. Righteous living wipes out the conditions in which demons can fester.

This is talking about our salvation. If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, not only were your sins forgiven; Christ gave you His perfect righteousness. That is, God credited the righteousness of Christ to your spiritual account. You are righteous today, and can live righteously, because of this transfer.

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So you don't have to get up in the morning determined to try to be righteous. Instead, you get up in the morning and say, "Because of Christ, I am righteous today." The breastplate of righteousness is part of the armor you wear all the time, because every day you are dressed in Christ's righteousness.

The third piece of our spiritual armor, and the last of the three pieces we wear every day, is the pair of shoes of "the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). If you are going to stand firm, you definitely need reliable footwear.

Earlier in Ephesians, Paul had said that Jesus is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). So we're still talking about getting dressed up in Jesus. The "gospel of peace," the good news of Jesus Christ, not only brings us truth and righteousness, but it also brings us the peace of God because we have peace with God. As we take steps in life, the good news of our relationship with God will confirm our steps with rest in the soul.

Now we come to the three pieces of the Christian's armor that Paul tells us to take up as the need arises. The first is the shield of faith, which allows us to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16b).

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The shield that a Roman soldier carried into battle was about four-and-a-half feet square. It even helped protect the soldier fighting beside the shield-holder. So Roman soldiers lined up side by side in close formation with their shields together, and all of them were covered as they advanced.

The shield of faith that protects us from anything Satan could fire at us is acting on the truth that we say we believe. We take up the shield of faith when we take the truth that we "amened" on Sunday and live it out on Monday.

Satan wants to hit us with as many flaming arrows as he can. That way, while we're fighting one fire he can hit us with another.

How can we put out Satan's fires? Answer: We can't. But the shield of faith can. So if we will act on God's Word and believe Him, God will send His angelic host to snuff out Satan's fiery arrows as they come in. When we operate on the truth we do know, God will take care of what we don't know.

The helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17a) is the next piece of armor that gives us authority over the Enemy.

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The helmet protects the head, the control center of the body. The purpose of a soldier's helmet was to absorb blows without causing damage to the head, much like a football player's helmet absorbs the shock of blows to his head.

We're talking about the battles you and I face every day. With the helmet of salvation protecting us, we have the authority to get on top of our circumstances, instead of letting our circumstances bury us.

Paul was talking about the use of the Word, not just its existence.

The helmet allows us to say to Satan, "Go ahead and hit me with your best shot, because 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me'" (see Philippians 4:13). The helmet's visor allows us to see Jesus (Hebrews 2:9) and focus on Him, so we will relate every area of life to our new identity in Christ. But when we develop spiritual Alzheimer's disease, forgetting our identity in Christ, we lose our spiritual authority.

Now we're ready to complete the armor. We do that when we take up "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17b). This was not the soldier's long sword, but a short, daggerlike sword about ten inches

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long. It had a needlelike point and was sharp on both sides. It was used for close-in fighting and could do some serious damage.

What's interesting is that the term Paul used for *word* here does not refer to the Bible as a written book of truth, the way we normally think of the Word of God.

Instead, this is *rhema*, the utterance of God, the Word as it is spoken. Paul was talking about the *use* of the Word, not just its existence.

The best example of wielding the Word was the temptation of Jesus. Satan attacked, but Jesus answered, "It is written," and then defeated Satan with the Word. Jesus hit the enemy with the Word, and the battle was over. It's a waste of time to memorize Scripture if we aren't using it in spiritual warfare.

The Access to Authority

Our weapons of spiritual warfare are powerful and complete, but they won't do us a lot of good if we don't know how to use them. Thankfully, the apostle Paul kept on writing, because in the very next verse he gave us the secret to using this great authority from God.

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In other words, after describing the Christian's battle dress, Paul told us *how to get dressed*, how to use the authority we possess: "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

It is prayer that gains us access to the authority needed for victorious warfare. Prayer is the way we get dressed for battle, so let's talk about the place of prayer in spiritual warfare.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRAYER IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Remember the story of the emperor who had no clothes? That's the way a lot of us go around spiritually. We're basically naked, unclothed, because prayer is not a dynamic, vital, potent, consistent, controlling, and all-encompassing reality in our Christian lives.

And because we don't have our spiritual clothes on, we wind up being spiritually embarrassed. And worse than that, we are getting mopped up by Satan although God has given us everything we need to defeat our enemy.

One of the first things a commander tries to do in warfare is to establish superiority in the air. The reason is that whoever controls the air war usually controls the war.

One of our problems is that the church is suffering a lot of casualties on the ground because we haven't established superiority in the air—in the heavenly places where the real

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warfare is taking place and where Jesus Christ has already won the war and established air superiority for all eternity.

The significance of prayer to spiritual warfare is evident in the first word of Ephesians 6:18: "*With* all prayer" (italics added). *With* is a connecting word. Prayer is vitally connected to Paul's discussion of spiritual warfare and the Christian's armor.

Prayer is the atmosphere in which we are to fight. It's the way we stay in vital daily contact with our Commander and activate our authority. Without prayer we don't get to use the things God has granted us. But when we access the armor of God through prayer, Satan can't touch us.

Prayer is so potent because it provides us with spiritual protection even when the battle is at its hottest. It's in prayer that we locate the ground on which we can stand firm.

It is reported that the emperor Napoleon once looked at a map and said, "If it were not for that one red dot, I could rule the world." That red dot was the British empire, the one place on the map Napoleon couldn't conquer.

Satan is a lot like Napoleon. He looks at the cross and says, "If it were not for that one red-

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stained cross, I could have conquered the human race."

But we escaped Satan's clutches because of that one red-stained cross. Now what we need to do is stand on what Christ has done, protected from the enemy by the power of prayer.

Prayer is necessary because it is through prayer that we engage the spiritual realm. When we pray, things happen in the heavenly places.

One of the great things about prayer is that in prayer we can hold God to His Word. There's a great example in Exodus 32:11-13, when Moses went before the Lord when God wanted to destroy the Israelites (vv. 9-10).

Moses reminded God of three things. First, these were the people He had rescued from Egypt. Second, if God destroyed the nation, the Egyptians would accuse Him of doing evil. And third, Moses reminded God of His great promises to Abraham and his descendants.

Then Exodus 32:14 says, "The Lord changed His mind." Now God was still sovereign in this situation, but from our human standpoint the intercession of Moses caused God to change His plans.

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I call this putting God on the spot. Moses was able to do this in his prayer because he understood God's nature. Moses appealed to God's grace, knowing that His grace could overrule His wrath.

We have the same privilege as Moses to hold God to His Word in prayer. That fact has some tremendous implications for our spiritual warfare.

For example, if the devil has been holding you in bondage to a habit you don't believe you can break, you need to hit him with Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Do you see what I'm saying? The enemy has got us believing lies. "I can't overcome this habit." "There is no saving this marriage." "I can't be the spouse God wants me to be."

Those are bald-faced lies. If these things are really true, then God is a liar. We would never call God a liar, but that's what we do by our actions when we don't claim His Word and His power in prayer.

Prayer is also necessary because of spiritual resistance in the heavenly realm. In Daniel 10, Daniel is told that the answer to his prayer was

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delayed three weeks by a demon called "the prince of Persia."

Daniel's prayer was heard and answered the first day he prayed. But it took three weeks of intercessory prayer and activity on the part of the angels, especially the archangel Michael, to break the demonic blockade and get the answer through.

When we pray properly, God puts out a restraining order against the powers of darkness.

The Scope of Prayer

The scope of prayer is also included in Ephesians 6:18. We are to pray "at all times" and "with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

The key word here is pretty obvious, isn't it? Prayer is to be made *all* the time, with *all* kinds of prayers, for *all* the saints. The scope of prayer is as wide as the world and as full as the hours in a day.

God wants us to bombard the heavenlies with our prayers. In a war, an army doesn't fire just one shell or launch one missile at the enemy. An army pounds the enemy with repeated fire.

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Paul tells us to pray with perseverance. Don't "hang up" on God too soon. As Paul put it in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." If you're going to see this thing work, prayer cannot be an addendum to your day or week. It must be the controlling agenda of your life. We need to pray when we feel like it and when we don't.

Anybody who's serious about prayer can tell you that real prayer is hard work. Why is that? Because this is war. Satan doesn't want you to do any praying at all.

But let me give you a word of encouragement. The more intimate your relationship with God, the easier the work of prayer is. It still takes work, but it's enjoyable work when you're communing with someone you love.

Warfare Praying

I'd like to introduce you to a new way of praying. I want to help you begin to use God's Word like a sledgehammer to break down walls and destroy fortresses. Let me tell you about what is often called warfare praying. If we are going to be soldiers, we may as well learn to pray like soldiers.

This is a new way of praying for many believers. It is praying God's Word back to Him

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and standing on it for victory in spiritual battle. God has such a high view of His Word that if you ever learn to pray His Word back to Him, you'll have power in prayer you never knew existed.

We need to start talking straight about our needs and using God's Word to crack the foundations of hell. Jesus dealt with Satan in the wilderness by hammering the devil with the Word. Jesus also said we must live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Are you praying about a problem or a situation that's so tough you wonder if it will ever be resolved? You say, "I hit it with the hammer of prayer one time, and nothing happened." Hit it again. Keep pounding on that wall with the Word of God until you see that first hairline crack. Then start praying even harder, because you know that wall is ready to come down.

Don't think I'm saying you have to do it all by your effort. Warfare praying is so powerful because our Helper is so powerful.

When Satan attacks, be faithful to do what God has asked you to do. There is Somebody on the other side of the heavenlies to take care of the Enemy for you. "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

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Keep praying, and God will make you a winner over Satan and his attacks.

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YOUR ACTIONS IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Now that we have done all this in an attempt to understand spiritual warfare, let's take up the weapons God has given us and start assaulting the gates of hell. Let's start attacking and tearing down the strongholds that Satan has erected against us.

Let's start by defining a satanic stronghold. A stronghold is a mind-set that accepts a situation as unchangeable, even though we know that situation is contrary to the will of God.

I think it's safe to say that many people in the body of Christ are in bondage to a satanic stronghold. They have yielded ground to Satan in their lives, and he has used that ground to build an outpost from which he wages war and makes that person his prisoner of spiritual battle.

Strongholds are like fortresses. Once they get built, they are tough to attack and take out. Some of those who have Satan's strongholds in their lives have tried everything to escape, but nothing has worked.

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Some strongholds are pretty obvious. Drug addiction is a satanic stronghold in which the flesh develops such a strong craving for chemicals that no matter how hard the person tries, he cannot let it go.

Some people are imprisoned by a stronghold of relationships. Another person has captured them emotionally and they are being held prisoner. For some it could even be parents who have long since died, but whose damaging influence will not allow the imprisoned person to go free.

For still other believers, the strongholds are not so obvious. They are private strongholds, fortresses of the mind and spirit that they can often hide from others. Sexual addictions such as pornography are a good example of this type of stronghold. Illicit thoughts and activities capture the mind, and people are unable to get themselves free.

Attitudes like anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness are also strongholds that we can allow Satan to construct in our hearts and minds if we are not vigilant against him.

It's unfortunate that Christians allow the devil to build his strongholds in their lives. It's even more unfortunate when they come to believe

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that this is the way they are doomed to live the rest of their lives because there's no way out.

Some of us blame other people for our strongholds. But people cannot cause you to surrender ground to Satan. They can certainly have an influence on you and help set you up for a stronghold. But strongholds get built when we fail to deal with sin and the devil in our own lives.

Sometimes we blame our strongholds on circumstances. A husband might say, "I wouldn't have hit my wife if she hadn't made me angry." No, all the wife did was provide an excuse for her husband's lack of control to express itself.

Someone else might say, "If they didn't have all that junk on cable television and in the movies and on the magazine racks, I wouldn't have a problem." No, all that junk does is help reveal how messed up the person with the problem really is.

Strongholds are spiritual problems, so until we attack them with our spiritual armor, they won't be torn down. The key passage here is 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, which says, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are

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not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses [or strongholds]."

Remember Your Position in Christ

The first thing you must do if you want to see spiritual strongholds topple is to remember your position in Christ.

We saw above that we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Here is the corollary action that should follow this knowledge: "If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2).

The solution to the strongholds Satan builds in our lives is found in Christ, "for in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10).

Christ has already beaten Satan and made a public spectacle of him (Colossians 2:15). Therefore, if you are going to beat the Evil One, you need to connect to Jesus, who won the victory over Satan.

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Your exalted position in Christ also gives you legal authority over Satan so that when he attacks you, you can tell him, "You no longer have any rights or jurisdiction in my life."

I have a suspicion that there aren't many believers who understand their position in Christ well enough to announce to Satan when they are under attack, "This is an illegitimate attempt to place me under your authority. You have no rights in my life, because I have been legally set free by Christ."

That simple statement can pack a lot of power, because Satan does not want you to understand the legal authority you have in Christ. He wants you to forget who you are, because then he knows you will never exercise your legal spiritual rights.

So when the Enemy brings up your past, for instance, and tells you that you can't overcome it, you have the legal right to say, "You're a liar. I have legal papers here. Jesus has triumphed over you, and I'm with Him."

So remember—and use—your position in Christ. You are seated with Him in heaven. You have rights against Satan. He has to retreat before authority that comes from Christ.

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Rely on God's Provision

Here is a second component in the process of tearing down strongholds. You must rely on God's provision.

The apostle James wrote, "[God] gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6).

What is this "greater grace" God gives us? James is not talking about salvation, but the grace we need to live victorious lives as believers. This is the grace that is greater than the mess you may be in right now, no matter how big.

In other words, the grace God gives you to tear down strongholds is far greater than the power keeping those strongholds propped up.

If all this grace is available, the question is, How do we get it? James lined out the answer in the following verses. He began by saying, "Submit therefore to God" (James 4:7a).

Commitment doesn't work unless it is preceded by surrender.

What does that mean? Well, James gives us a great picture of what submission to God does

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not mean (vv. 1 -5). You're not submitted if your life is marked by things like illicit pleasure, strife, lust, envying, and friendship with the world.

I use the term "surrender" instead of submission here because surrender is the forgotten element in submission. You don't often hear the full story when the concept of submission is taught. But if you want to submit to God so you can receive His greater grace, you need to understand all that is involved in submission.

Submission is usually presented as the process of making a commitment to Christ. That's important, but it's possible to make a commitment to the Lord without really surrendering our wills to Him.

Here's what I mean. Someone who is struggling with a stronghold can say, "I've made a commitment to the Lord, and I'm going to stop doing what I've been doing."

That sounds fine, but many people who make that kind of commitment promptly go out and fall flat on their faces. Why? Because commitment doesn't work unless it is preceded by surrender. Commitment often says, "I can," but surrender says, "Lord, I can't."

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What I'm talking about is the attitude that says, "I can lick this thing myself." There's a big difference between that and realizing I need Christ's strength (Philippians 4:13). Christ's power doesn't kick in until we let go of our delusions of self-power. And that comes through surrender.

But there is still a place for commitment. Having said to God, "I can't on my own," you are now ready to say, "But through Your provision of that which I lack, I *can* go out and tear down the strongholds that are defeating me." You have now invited God to do for you what you can't do for yourself.

We are too self-sufficient, and that's why we haven't been able to tear down the strongholds. It's not that we don't try. I'm not saying that we set out to let problems and sins and failures take hold in our lives and become strongholds.

But how many times do believers promise themselves and God, "I'm going to stop doing this or that next year"? And they really mean it. They just don't have the power to carry through with their intentions. But God has something infinitely better for us than self-effort. It's called greater grace.

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James continued his instruction to us: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

We draw near to God when we enter His presence and spend time in prayer and worship before Him. If the only worship and praise God gets out of you is on Sunday morning, you're not drawing near to Him. You're just visiting Him occasionally.

Satan is allergic to prayer. When the air is filled with prayer and praise, it chokes Satan up and makes it hard for him to function, just like pollen in the air aggravates a physical allergy. Satan can't hang around because the environment is too uncomfortable for him. Satan can't handle it when you draw near to God.

Repent of Sin

Along with remembering our position and relying on God's provision, tearing down strongholds also involves repentance.

James wrote, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom" (4:8-9).

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Admitting our sin simply means taking responsibility for it. It takes humility to admit your sin, but when you humble yourself in this way you get God's greater grace.

The opposite of humility is pride, and verse 6 goes on to say that "God is opposed to the proud." So instead of getting God's greater grace, the proud person gets God's hand in his face, resisting him and pushing him away.

Why does God push proud people away from Him? Because when we are proud we remind Him of Satan.

You can't be proud and come to God seeking His greater grace. Why? Because when you come needing grace, you don't have anything to brag about. When you need God's mercy, you can't be talking about who you are and what you have done. God wants to talk about your sin, but you want to talk about yourself. It doesn't work. Pride and humility don't mix.

Resist the Devil

I've saved this one for last even though it appears earlier in James 4: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (v. 7).

We have talked about dealing with the devil, but I want you to see it in the context of tearing

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down strongholds. The important thing is the order of these exhortations. Submitting yourself to God must come before resisting the devil.

Peter helps us here because he said the same thing. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Why do you need to humble yourself before God?

Because, Peter said, you have an enemy who walks around like "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (v. 8). The devil wants to eat up your mind, chew up your circumstances, devour your joy, shred your dignity, and digest your marriage and your family.

That sounds bad, but Peter went on. You don't need to flee in fear before this lion. Instead, "resist him, firm in your faith" (v. 9). Here is the same order of events as in James. Submit to God, and you're ready to resist the devil.

One day a father and his little boy were watching the lions at the zoo when a lion let out a deafening roar. The terrified boy screamed and ran off, begging his father to run

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too. But his father told him to come back because the lion wouldn't hurt him.

"Son," the father said, "don't look at the lion. Look at the cage." As long as we focus on the Person and power of Christ, we won't have to worry about Satan's roar.

Put God's Word to the Test

I want to ask you a question. If we have all the authority and power we need to defeat Satan and tear down his strongholds, why don't more of us put God's Word to the test more often? What are we waiting for? Why should we pull back and cower in fear?

We have the Word of God, and we have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, whom the Bible says faced every temptation you and I will ever face (Hebrews 4:14-16). It's time to enlist in God's army and get into the battle.

Our problem today is that we have too many Christian civilians and not enough Christian soldiers. Some of us simply want to jump into a soldier's uniform when we run into a problem, rather than understanding we *are* soldiers who are supposed to be in uniform at all times because we are in a war.

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You can take a major step toward victory right now by praying something like this: "Lord, I am facing Satan in these areas of my life (name the areas). I can't beat Satan on my own, so I am going to stand against him in Your name and Your strength."

When you fight the devil this week, instead of trying to prove how strong you are, tell God how weak you are. Instead of arguing you can, tell God you can't. Instead of saying, "I know I have the ability," tell God, "I don't have the ability." And then stand in the Lord's strength and His ability to deal with the Enemy in your life.

We are at war, but it's not like other wars. Christ has already won! All we have to do is enlist, put on our fatigues and our boots, and pick up our weapons, because it's time to march! It's time to win some spiritual battles.

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