

Battle-Ready: Equip Yourself for Spiritual Warfare

Editor's Note: This is a two-part article. Watch for part two tomorrow on .

“Spiritual warfare” is a phrase you might hear some Christians use, but the truth is many people do not fully know what it is, or what to do about it.

One way to explain spiritual warfare is by comparing it to physical war. Historical battles were often about controlling territory for political or economic power. Spiritual warfare is the battle for control over people’s souls.

Whether you believe in and follow Him or not, God created you for a reason. He created you to know Him and experience His love. He created you for you to love others as you love yourself and to use your skills and talents for the good of the world—to point people to Him.

However, God has an enemy, who is known as Satan or the devil. Because he is an enemy to God and God’s people, he is sometimes referred to as simply “the enemy.”

Satan is committed to preventing people from knowing God and trusting Him with their lives. The enemy’s tactics may differ depending on whether someone is already a Christian or not, but his ultimate purpose is always to keep people from experiencing the love of God.

Whether you feel under spiritual attack right now, you know someone else who might be or you just want to understand spiritual warfare better, below are some resources to help you understand this topic and how to use one of the greatest tools God has given us in our battle: prayer.

How Are You Involved in Spiritual Warfare?

Spiritual warfare sounds like a battle between God and His enemies. So, what does it have to do with the rest of us?

If you have chosen to begin a personal relationship with God, then you know that you have asked Him to be in control of your life. But part of you wants to take back control and continues to put up an internal fight.

You might even feel like there is a battle going on inside your mind some of the time. Do you have days when you struggle to believe what the Bible says about God, or about you? That's completely natural. But lies—especially subtle ones—are one of the enemy's favorite tactics.

Know Your Enemies

The Bible teaches that three forces are battling with God for ownership of your heart: the world, the flesh and the devil. Thankfully, God is stronger than all of them.

1. The world.

Societies and cultures in the world encourage people to think and act in certain ways. Some elements of every society or culture can point you toward Jesus, some are neither good nor bad, and some directly conflict with your ability to follow Jesus and maintain a strong connection with God.

The things a culture values—whatever it focuses its attention on—are usually a clear indicator of the position God's commandments are given in it. In our Western culture, physical appearance, personal success and freedom from responsibility to the wider community are just three examples of things the world encourages you to put before God.

Scripture reminds us that to walk closely with God, we need to be alert to the ways we are influenced by the people around us.

“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16, NIV).

2. The flesh.

Although the influence of the world around you is very real, you also need to be aware that the struggle to turn away from God can come from within you—from your own sin and your own desires.

The apostle Paul, who helped spread the early church as a missionary and wrote much of the New Testament, struggled with his flesh. He gave us a great picture of what this struggle feels like:

“It happens so regularly that it’s predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God’s commands, but it’s pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Part of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge” (Rom. 7:21-23, MSG).

3. The devil.

Ultimately, the devil has already been defeated by what Jesus did when He died on a cross. Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead demonstrates that He won the victory over death. But the devil wants to blind people to the truth of what Jesus has done.

The devil’s attempts to send us off course in our relationship with God go right back to the beginning of the human story. He was the author of the first temptation humankind faced.

The temptation of Adam and Eve, which we read about in Genesis 3, provides a clear picture of what you can expect from the devil:

- He is craftier than any wild animal.
- He comes alongside you pretending to be an ally.

- He deceives you by trying to bend the truth God speaks to you.
- He tries to plant doubts in your mind about the things God has said.
- He wants you to think God is restricting you when in reality He is protecting you.
- He encourages you to rebel against God by telling you that you deserve to be the ultimate authority of Your life.
- He uses your pride and your sense of shame to turn you against others.

Be mindful that our enemy, the devil, is real. He is single-minded and dangerous, so be wise in how you conduct your warfare with him. If you follow Jesus, God has given you incredible resources by placing the Holy Spirit within you, but you need to resist letting your pride tempt you to try to fight the enemy on your own.

Fighting Spiritual Battles the Jesus Way

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus faced spiritual warfare in many forms. He was tested by the devil during His 40 days in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). He was provoked, falsely accused and verbally abused by people who did not like what He was saying. And it's important to remember that Jesus was a man—fully human—so He faced all the temptations any other man would face.

But He never lost any of His spiritual battles. Even His wrongful conviction and execution on the cross, which looked like bitter defeat, were ultimately His greatest victory. So, what examples does Jesus give us about using prayer in spiritual warfare?

Jesus Created Space to Be Alone With God

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16, NIV).

Many times in the Gospels, Jesus withdrew from situations we can interpret as scenes of spiritual warfare. One example is when Jesus heard the news that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed by Herod. It never says that He retreated from His enemy. Instead, He withdrew from a particular place.

There is nothing wrong with praying in a coffee shop or while walking in a public place. But it’s important to take regular time alone with God, preferably as free from distractions as possible.

Jesus wanted to give God His full attention and spend time with His heavenly Father. If even Jesus needed to withdraw from crowds and His friends to be alone with God—and Jesus is God—how much more do His followers need to do the same?

Taking time alone with God reminds us that He is ready and waiting to spend time alone with us, healing our wounds and renewing our strength. {eoa}

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