

Spiritual Warfare: Beating Down the Spirit of Absalom

The moment you advance with prophetic and apostolic focus is the moment the spirit of Absalom is awakened. That cunning wicked spirit specializes on feeding into the deeply felt frustrations of people whose desires go unmet in the church. Satan is a master at accusation due to the never-ending practice of his craft.

“... for the accuser of our brothers, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down” (Rev. 12:10b).

“Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him” (Zech. 3:1).

Satan intercedes “on our behalf” night and day, accusing us before the Lord. This is yet another reason why we must have a day and night prayer movement arise in every city on Earth!

Historically in our ministry, it is when we take fervent, strategic intercession to the next level that we see the accuser begin to speak loudly and convincingly to the people who are running the race with us. He preys on those who are growing in their resistance to prayer.

Manitou Springs, Colorado

When you take prayer to the next, critical level, you can expect schisms and disruptions to come to your ministry and your life. We have seen it in so many ministries, including our own in a variety of places and in a variety of ways.

I planted and gave leadership to Revolution Church in Manitou Springs, Colorado beginning in 2001. We experienced some extremely difficult seasons, each immediately after we shifted

the church into a greater prayer focus. We weren't only praying, but we were developing a prayer culture. Prayer was the main thing, and everything that we did, as the transition happened, was to support that emphasis.

Keep in mind that Manitou Springs is an extremely dark region right at the base of Pikes Peak. One national leader told me he believes it's the darkest city in the nation. Witchcraft and the occult are extremely intense there, and there were no life-giving churches other than ours and a small Episcopal church that was led by a fiery, Spirit-filled pastor. In fact, I was told that since the mid-1980s, 14 churches had started and failed within their first two years.

It was in this environment where we experienced absolutely stunning supernatural manifestations. God was on the move, the enemy was feeling the assault against his kingdom and we had no option but to take prayer to a much higher level. There were many times that we'd take teams of intercessors deep into the cave systems in Manitou Springs, turn out our lights and pray for four to five hours in perfect darkness. I can't begin to describe how powerful that was! In fact, one extremely significant day we took a prayer journey up to the top of Pikes Peak, and that evening we went into the belly of the Earth to continue our intercession. Prayer was on the rise—and the assault was about to land.

Two of the resulting challenges were directly initiated by the Absalom spirit.

Challenge No. 1

My wife and I interviewed a man and his wife for a pastoral care position in the church. I am not a pastor myself, meaning I don't have the giftings of that particular office. Barbara Yoder who is a friend and the leader of the network that we submit to identifies me as a prophetic apostle. I don't care at all about the title, but it's helpful to know who you are

and who you are not!

Since I was clearly not at all energized by the various demands of pastoral ministry, and I was focused on other important assignments, I really desired someone to step in to help carry the pastoral load.

I'll never forget the slight check in my spirit that I had as we were interviewing this couple. God said, "No," and I said, "You're hired!"

The couple stepped right up and started connecting relationally to people. They seemed to be doing a great job! In fact, he would stand at the door every Sunday and hug people as they entered. In hindsight, that should have been a red flag.

As time went by, I started to feel extremely unsettled in my spirit. Keep in mind, the prayer culture was starting to take form and, though I didn't realize it at the time, this was the reason for the disturbance in my spirit. Resistance was increasing, though I didn't know what the specific source was.

One day I called the staff together and shared with them the increasing trouble I was sensing and instructed them to pray. We went strong in prayer as a team—except for one. The new pastor was clearly struggling. The more intense the tongues, the more uncomfortable he appeared.

As we continued in that prayer storm, I decreed that a shaking must come to our church. I shouted, "God, shake our church! Shake our church!" I prayed, in the fear of the Lord, for God to lovingly bring any necessary judgment to me and to our ministry—to make wrong things right. I knew only God, in His perfect wisdom, could resolve this trauma in the spirit.

A few days later I was sitting in the church with my Children's Pastor and her husband, along with their baby who was sitting in a stroller. Our building was a 100-year-old

wooden structure with large beams along the top of the ceiling.

Suddenly the entire property started violently shaking! We looked around, wondering what was happening. It felt like an earthquake.

Then we heard a crashing sound above our heads as one of the large beams plummeted down and landed right between me and the baby. I didn't connect the dots at that moment, but the shaking I had prayed for was manifesting. First in the natural, and next in the spirit.

Very soon after that happened I received an email from the pastor. He told me that he was resigning effective immediately. I was shocked. I emailed him back requesting a phone call or a meeting. He declined and I never saw him again.

He started his own church, took about one-fourth of our church—and then closed his church a month later and moved to Florida with his family. Everybody he influenced to leave was left to wander alone in confusion.

The Absalom spirit attacked with vengeance and it left destruction in its path.

God's answer? Prune. We prayed for the shaking and the judgment, and while it was severe and difficult, it was necessary. Our ministry immediately became stronger and more unified after God swept through.

While I have extreme fear of the Lord on me when I feel it necessary to request the intervention of the judge, I always know that he is a good judge who loves deeply and who can be trusted fully.

Challenge No. 2

There was another situation in Colorado many years ago that

resulted in an underground “spirit of Absalom” situation that was fueled by offense.

I started to hear the rumors: John doesn’t love people. Amy and I felt like we were hit by a train.

Someone on my staff had a false expectation about something I considered to be incredibly minor. I was unable to meet that specific request due to needing to be somewhere later that night. It wasn’t until months later that I put two and two together and realized that an underground movement of gossip was setting some on my staff and team against me.

The accusation? I don’t love people because I wasn’t there for them that day. Further, since that situation, according to their analysis, revealed my true, unloving heart, and my motives in ministry were now compromised, there must be an effort to resist the ministry—and, for them, it was in the name of love!

My initial split-second reaction when I received knowledge of the situation was this: That doesn’t make sense! I love that person and the others so much. Of all things how could that be the accusation?

I was really saddened that those who I expressed love to by welcoming them onto our team, supporting them in their ministries, encouraging them to be free to lead with passion, etc. were rejecting my expression of love! Wow! Isn’t it interesting how it all works together—how the enemy can twist and turn things in such a dastardly way!

This was the same individual that had come to me previously with a dilemma. She had to deal with a situation in the church, but she didn’t want to make waves. She asked, “John, how in the world can I handle this explosive situation and convince the person that I love them?” I simply responded, “Why are you trying to attempt to convince them you love them? Simply love them.”

If we try to convince people we love them, we won't actually love them when administering true tough love and biblical discipline. True biblical love at times does not feel like the love our culture has defined.

My heart breaks over situations like this. Can I love better? Oh man, YES! But, I also need to help bring this issue to the surface. Too many leaders are not living according to their calling, because they are so busy modifying their personality and mandate to match what others expect!

We must love according to how God designed us. The cross wasn't welcomed, but it was the method Jesus was mandated to use. It didn't feel like love then, but boy was it.

As the prayer culture continued to develop, the resistance elevated. Some people broke away, and I'll never forget the tears I could hear when I talked on the phone with my wife one day. She was wounded and broken.

Though I was supposed to take my position for a prayer watch that night, I left. I went home. I gave up that night as well. We went to bed hurting and troubled. As leaders, we were doing our best to move at the sound of the voice of the Lord—but the resistance was nearly too much to bear. Great friends betrayed us and we didn't know what to do.

In the morning she and I woke up startled. My wife had a dream. The earth opened up underneath Manitou Springs and the entire town was sucked into Hell. I had a sharp pain in my body that I knew was due to an open door to a specific demonic attack. We both knew we couldn't give up. The mission was still on. We repented and the split second I did, the severe pain left my body. The open door of wrongful surrender to the enemy's threats was closed.

The Test

I will never get over how God works. He is beyond amazing.

Both my wife and I will admit that we were deeply wounded when this individual rose up against us. We instantly had to humble ourselves and allow God to work on our hearts. Though we feel we handled it well, God will always test us. That test is not for God, but for us—it will clearly show where we really are with a situation.

The coming church is going to be jealously guarded by God, a loving Bridegroom. There won't be room for bitter, unforgiving leaders, and we have to be willing to be continually tested by God. We must crave his involvement!

Our staff member finally decided to move from Colorado to another far away state. We thanked Jesus! What a wonderful moment that was! Though we had forgiven her, it felt good that the drama was over.

A year or so later, Amy and I were called to leave Colorado and move to Kansas City to join the staff of the International House of Prayer. Though we loved Colorado and the ministry there, we couldn't deny that God was opening doors to Missouri, and we also couldn't deny that a fresh new season was quite welcome.

We thought we'd only be there for the three-month internship, but ended up staying for two years as we gave leadership to that very same internship as Directors. It was a very exciting time for our family—until ... the crisis. I won't go into the entire dramatic story, but please understand we were suddenly blindsided and the pain was real.

We lost an unborn baby (we've lost a total of seven) and were replaced as Directors of the internship in the same week. Suddenly, a lot of life and joy was replaced by very real, unexpected and confusing pain. Now, understand, though we were in another trial, we were processing very well.

Being replaced in the internship did make sense, even though we enjoyed serving in that ministry so much! That role called

for a very different personality type and gift mix, and I didn't realize this when Mike Bickle offered me the position. They were so gracious in the entire process, and we love that ministry deeply!

However, again, the pain was legitimate. You might wonder how this story connects with the story of pain in Colorado. Get ready for this.

Remember, God will go to great lengths to ensure we are operating in love, and that we are humble and teachable.

At this time, God began opening doors for ministry in Detroit, Michigan. In those meetings he began to move in a very dramatic and powerful way, confirming His Word with signs following. So after much prayer, we felt led that we should move to Detroit. Now in the natural, this was not the best time to sell our house in Kansas City. The economy was bad and *Forbes Magazine* had recently called our city the eighth-fastest dying city in America! So my wife put out a fleece: if God wants us to move to Detroit, he will have our house sell for our full asking price within seven days of placing it on the market.

Miraculously, God sold our home after being on the market for only six days!

Glory to God! We were in another exciting, miraculous season!

About 30 days before we were to move from Kansas City to Detroit I sat in my last all-staff meeting at IHOP. There was over a thousand people in that meeting, and I sat in the very back, on the floor, kind of bored and ready to get on with my day. Then it happened. The impossible happened.

From the platform I heard the leader of the meeting say something like, "We would like to introduce a new staff member who will be giving leadership to a new ministry on our base. Everybody welcome..."

No way! No way! No way!

It was impossible! When I heard her very distinct, unusual name, and saw her welcomed onto the team, I was speechless. I think my jaw hung down for quite a long time. My head was spinning as I was witnessing an invasion into our fragile world.

There was simply no way that this person, who had done so much damage to our ministry in Colorado, who had moved to a far away state, could suddenly converge with our life in Kansas City!

I stepped outside and called my wife. I'll never forget her response to my news. After I told her who was now on staff, all I heard her say, with defeat in her tone, was, "No."

Do you realize what happened? God set up this encounter, this trial, to test our hearts.

When I got home that afternoon, we talked and resolved that it was indeed a test, and we endeavored to pray for this person and to ask God to bless her deeply!

I never did see her over the next month. Amy, however, had a very important chance encounter with her. The very last day we lived in Kansas City, as the moving truck was being loaded in the driveway, Amy went to the bank to close our account. You guessed it. Standing in line right in front of her was our former staff member.

My wife smiled big and gave her a huge hug! Amy felt so good that it was so easy to love this person!

That was the last time we ever saw her, and to this day we pray for her to be wildly blessed!

Love will certainly manifest in many different ways, but for those who are called of God, that love will be tested. The coming church will be a love-bathed church, and we must

welcome the testing, no matter how painful it is. My wife would say the freedom and abundant life she feels regarding the Colorado/Kansas City crisis is well worth the trial she and I went through.

Though I will share strategies on how to deal with Absalom in a moment, the primary strategy must be love. We cannot react in bitterness or resentment. Love heals.

Editor's Note: This is the first of a two-part series. For part two, tune in Friday.

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