

Showing a 'Spiritual Strongman' Who's in Charge

Ron and I were young pastors, but we had a distinct advantage over the previous pastors who had come from the outside. Since we had attended the church as parishioners, we knew the power structures controlling it from within. But incoming senior leaders, one by one, had been left blindsided and defeated, not knowing what they were up against.

The pastor before us, for example, tried desperately to navigate the power web, only to end up in the hospital with stress illnesses. For the sake of his physical and emotional health, he had to go minister somewhere else. Elite parishioners, motivated by power and self-interest, were in charge of the church, not the pastors. Pastors wanting to survive our church were either forced to give away their leadership or forced to leave.

Cindy Jacobs of Generals International once described how demonic powers stand behind an earthly structure or leader to accomplish their evil intentions. She explained in an article that this was the nature of a "strongman." She then noted how a strongman needs to be overcome by a stronger One, referring to Jesus, and that this is accomplished through the prayers and intercession of the church (Luke 11:21-22).

In the matter of church, we discerned quickly that we were dealing with much more than a group of controlling personalities. We were dealing with a strongman—a demonic spirit, to be exact.

How did we make that connection? Two powerful factions in the church had a perplexing habit of placing memorial plaques to deceased relatives in key areas in and around the facilities. We had plaques on walls, shelves, chairs, tables, hymnals and

the list goes on.

This made the church feel more like a shrine to the dead rather than a life-giving worship center. It also caused a hindrance to making needed facility upgrades. Discussions about remodeling were stalled or rebuffed because that wall or that closet, for example, had been dedicated to someone's memory. The last straw was when one of the factions donated money to build a kitchen inside the church and then named the kitchen after their family name! They were not even dead yet, but the customary plaque was already hanging on the wall, a symbol that sealed their power on that part of the building.

I cannot remember where I read it, but around that time I was looking through a book that described some Scandinavian occult practices from the "old country." It caught my interest, as I am part Scandinavian and it was the dominant ethnicity of our church at that time. What struck me was its reference to ancestral worship and how it had mixed with Christianity centuries ago in Europe. The description was strangely familiar to our present situation. I knew we were dealing with some type of witchcraft in the church, but I did not have a name for it because it was happening in a Christian context. I brought the information from the book to my husband and a few others so we could pray and strategically act.

Jesus has instructed us to bind things in the spirit realm that work against God's kingdom (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). To *bind* something means "to tie it up," and we accomplish that by making a specific command with our words (Mark 11:23-24). Therefore, using our words, we forbade the spirit of ancestral worship from operating in our church, in Jesus' name, and then asked the Lord to send His Holy Spirit to rule and reign instead.

The things did not change overnight, but we persisted in prayer. Eventually, some board members felt impressed by the Holy Spirit to begin removing the plaques from around the

church, including the infamous kitchen plaque, until none remained. The process took a few years, but this time there was very little resistance. Each time we removed a plaque, we could feel power being reassigned to its proper place. Power structures were losing their influence, and those involved began exiting the church. The strongman was being dismantled.

These factions had divided this church for an astonishing 50 years before the spirit behind them was broken. The church almost died before things turned around. The pastors before us kept falling into the same trap. They would try to solve the problems relationally without knowing how to deal with them spiritually. They needed to recognize a spiritual strongman was at work and then to show that spirit who was in charge.

Kingdom Prayer Principles (*condensed*)

1. Our spiritual authority rests in knowing who's in charge.
2. Jesus connected His ministry of power to His lifestyle of prayer. He said, "I only do what I see the Father doing."
3. Demonic powers, or the "strongman," can stand behind earthly structures or leaders to accomplish their evil intentions. We will not be able to solve problems relationally if they are actually spiritual problems.
4. When we "bind" things in the spirit realm that work against God's kingdom, we are actually "tying it up." We do this by using our words and commanding it to be done.

Thoughts for Reflection (*condensed*)

1. Is there any area of your life in which you've given your authority away? Are you ready to take it back?
2. Have you considered that a person opposed to the Holy Spirit could be the agent of a strongman? How would you know for sure?

3. Many Christians try to change a person who is the agent of a strongman through relationship and fail at it. Since it is a spiritual issue, how then should you handle this kind of problem? {eoa}

Excerpted from Jennifer Eivaz's book, The Intercessor's Handbook.

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