

Making the Devil Tremble

The Link between Prayer and Spiritual Warfare

By Alvin VanderGriend



I was a pastor at the time. Alivia (name changed) came for counseling. By the end of the counseling session she was ready to commit her life to Christ. I suggested a way for her to pray. We bowed together and I prayed first. When it was her turn to pray, there was silence, then gentle weeping.

“What’s happening?” I asked.

“I can’t say those words,” she said. “I want to, but I just can’t say them!”

I realized then that something deeply spiritual was going on, that the evil one was binding her and keeping her from praying that prayer of trust and surrender.

I remembered John’s contention that the power of Christ in us is greater than the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3–4). I explained to Alivia that Christ was stronger than Satan and

that, if she really wanted Jesus to occupy the throne of her heart, He would expel the evil one and take up His place there.

“Do you want Him to do that?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, “I do!”

So I prayed and asked Christ to do just that—to overpower the evil one, evict him from her heart, and take up His place there. Then she prayed and spoke the words she had been unable to speak before, words of faith and surrender that began her journey of new life in Christ.

After receiving Christ, the first words out of her mouth were, “I felt it, I felt it! It felt like someone moved out of me and someone else moved in.” She understood what happened. It was a wonderful moment of joy and peace for Alivia, a moment of victory for Jesus, a moment of defeat for the devil, and a moment of enlightenment for me. I understood, more clearly than before, why Satan dreads our prayers.

Our Supreme Weapon

One of my favorite quotes on spiritual warfare comes from the anonymous book *The Kneeling Christian*: “There is nothing the devil dreads so much as prayer? His great concern is to keep us from praying. Someone has wisely said, ‘Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.’”¹

The phrase I like best says, Satan “trembles when we pray.” Even though I like the phrase, I find it hard to imagine that Satan trembles when I pray. Can my prayers really make him tremble?

But then, when I remember what God does when I pray, I understand. You see, it’s not us or our prayers that Satan fears. It’s Christ that he fears. He dreads prayer because he

dreads what Christ does when we pray. He knows that Christ hears and answers prayer. And that spells trouble for him.

Prayer is our supreme weapon against evil. By prayer we can thwart Satan's attacks, foil his schemes, and lessen his effectiveness. By prayer we assault the devil's strongholds, build the Kingdom of God, send workers into the harvest fields, and open doors for the gospel. Prayer, real prayer, is Satan's undoing. He does not know how to cope with prayer. That's why he works so hard to keep us from praying.

Wesley Duewel defines warfare prayer as "joining Christ in driving out and defeating Satan and in setting his captives free. It is advancing against Satan's strongholds and dislodging and expelling demon forces."²

Two elements in this definition are particularly important. First, Duewel emphasizes that warfare prayer is "joining Christ" in His victory over the forces of hell. Christ is the One conquering Satan, not us. We are cooperating with Him, not He with us. He won the victory on the cross. We are pitching in with the mop-up operation.

Second, Duewel underscores the crucial fact that the battle is primarily offensive: moving out against Satan and reclaiming what is rightfully Christ's. The primary way that Christ claims His own, and wrests people from the grip of Satan, is through conversion.

I serve as the chairman of the board of Light of the World Prayer Center, a ministry that impacts the Pacific Northwest. A recent newsletter described the joy of a captive finding salvation through Christ:

A man sat slumped in a doorway—homeless, without hope, weeping. He did not know that this night his life would forever change. He had no idea that a young man named Jon was on a mission to find him or that across town at the Prayer Center a group of people were praying for Jon and for him. Jon

and his team with Rising Hope were on the streets that night to share the love and gospel of Jesus Christ with the broken and outcast of our community. Jon stopped for the man weeping in the doorway and shared the good news of the gospel with him. The man put his faith in Jesus and prayed a prayer of salvation! A huge smile crossed this once-weeping face and he exclaimed, "I don't know what exactly happened here, but I know I am totally changed!"

Christ set him free. The devil was defeated.

Link between Prayer and Warfare

The conflict between good and evil, between God and the devil, is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. Christ's coming to earth moved the battle to a whole new level.

- John stresses that "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).
- Luke summarizes Jesus' life and ministry by saying, "He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38).
- Paul disclosed the "how" of Christ's victory: "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).
- Jesus, on His way to the cross, foresaw that His death would have both a repelling and an attracting effect. He said, "Now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32). Christ, who won these victories on earth, now continues to enforce His victory from heaven through the intercessory prayers of believers. And, as the finale approaches, the God of peace is going to "soon crush Satan under your feet"

(Rom. 16:20).

Several Bible passages clearly link intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare. The one we are probably most familiar with comes at the end of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus teaches us to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." Jesus understood the reality and the power of evil in the world. He knew that we would need constant protection, so He urges us to make prayer for deliverance a regular part of our prayer lives. Near the end of His life Jesus practiced this very thing when He asked the Father not to take His disciples out of the world but to "protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Spiritual deliverance depends on constant prevailing prayer.

On another occasion, after Jesus' disciples had failed to cast out a demon, they asked Him, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus answered, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:28-29). Jesus was reminding them, and us, that we do not have the ability to defeat forces of evil in our own power. That power belongs to God, and God's hand is moved through our prayers. Christ wants us to pray so that He can gain the victory. Satan would like to have us try to win the victory in our own strength—for obvious reasons.

A short time before Simon Peter's denial, Jesus said to him, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). What's surprising in this account is that Jesus does not ask the Father to deny Satan's request to sift Peter. He allows the test, which was somehow for Peter's benefit. Peter had to come to grips with what was in his heart—with the arrogance that made him think that he was stronger than all the other disciples and with the fear that gave rise to his denial.

But Jesus prayed, and, as a result, Peter's faith did not fail. Satan's sifting brought him insight and healing. Peter gained a victory and was able afterward to strengthen his brothers. Satan's plan was derailed by Jesus' prayer.

Saints Who Wrestle

Intercession was also the key to winning battles over the powers of evil in the early years of the Church. When commanded not to speak in Jesus' name and threatened with harm if they did, the believers of Jerusalem "raised their voices together in prayer to God." They asked to be able to "speak [the] word with great boldness" and to "heal and perform [miraculous] signs and wonders" (Acts 4:24, 29–30).

What happened? Just what you would expect! God heard and answered. They spoke the word with boldness. They "performed many . . . signs and wonders among the people" and "more and more men and women believed in the Lord. . . . Crowds gathered . . . bringing their sick and those tormented by [evil] spirits, and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:12–16). Satan was defeated, his territory invaded, and his captives released. That's spiritual warfare by means of intercession.

Our struggle, said Paul, is "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Paul ends his somber depiction of the operations of evil in the world by calling us to "be alert and always keep on praying for all the [saints]" (Eph. 6:12, 18).

The weapon of prayer is a strong weapon that God has placed in our hands in order to come against the invisible forces of evil that operate in our world today. Our prayers move the arm of God to destroy the works of the devil.

Satan can deal with most everything we come at him with, but

he cannot deal with the arm of the Lord moved through prayer. You can be sure that the saints you know are under attack, and they need your sustaining prayers.

Ask Jesus for the resolve to faithfully pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." Ask for the Spirit's help to "always keep on praying for all the [saints]," the Lord's people, starting with those who are nearest and dearest to you. Ask God to give you a holy boldness and strong faith as you join Him in setting captives like Alivia and the homeless man free.

It can be a wonderful moment of joy and peace for the freed captives, a moment of victory for Jesus, a moment of defeat for the devil, and a moment of enlightenment and strengthening for us all.

¹The Kneeling Christian (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 17.²Wesely Duewel, Touch the World Through Prayer (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 208.

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