

6.7 Defensive Spiritual Warfare

As you move forward in the area of Strategic Prayer, you will face opposition on many fronts. Strategic Prayer is about the advancement of God's Kingdom, and therefore engaging in it will bring about a reaction from the three main elements opposed to the Kingdom: the world system around you, your own flesh, and spiritual forces of darkness.

The world system, that is built in opposition to the Kingdom values of Jesus (1 John 2:16), will seek to divert you from your focus on Strategic Prayer by:

- generating debate and controversy around you about the validity of investing "ministry time" in prayer
- distracting you through enticements to pride, impurity, and self-centeredness
- increasing the level of noise and distraction around you, making it difficult to pray

Your flesh, which is opposed to the work of the Spirit in your inner person (Gal. 5:17), will seek to weaken and shrink your ability to engage in Strategic Prayer by:

- goading you to nurture personal hurts and offences (real or imagined) from others
- preventing forgiveness and openness in relationships with team members and co-workers
- embittering you toward God through increased awareness of the things that you have "given up" for the sake of the Gospel
- discouraging you about prayer, making you feel it is too boring, difficult, costly, or impractical

Powers of darkness and spiritual forces of evil will engage in an all-out effort to abort and overthrow your pressing into their territory (Eph. 6:12) by:

- increasing the pace of "crises" in your family, ministry, relationships, and possessions that arise, to which you must respond
- directing attacks against the unity of your team and family, especially focusing on relational difficulties between husband and wife, and team leader and team members

- direct attacks of sickness and physical affliction
- direct attacks of fear, intimidation, and demonic oppression

When facing spiritual attack, it is important to be able to put into action all of the defensive weapons and tactics granted to us by God for our victory. Without an adequate spiritual defence, you will not be able to sustain the kind of ongoing prayer life and prayer strategy that will bring about the breakthrough you are looking for.

Although in a sense it can be said that all of the teachings, encouragements, and principles of scripture are an important part of maintaining a strong spiritual defence in times of spiritual attack, the following points have proven to be particularly helpful for people facing the kind of spiritual attack that often comes in response to a concerted and intentional advance in prayer.

6.7.a Maintain Purity

Jesus observed in Matthew 5:8 that the “pure in heart” are blessed because they will see God. Seeing God is something that is particularly key for an intercessor. The degree to which we are able to see God as we pray greatly affects the level of faith with which we request things of Him, and our level of endurance in seeking Him. Because of this, powers of darkness will work with extra diligence to incite us to give in to our flesh and to the world system by surrendering our purity.

Purity does not just refer to the area of sexuality, although that is a key area. Some of the areas of sin which will become most enticing to us when we are under spiritual attack include:

- Sexual immorality – whether in thought or in act, including impure thoughts and fantasies, unhealthy attachments to members of the opposite sex, lustful looks or glances, pornography, masturbation, etc.
- Pride – this can often come cloaked in feelings of having attained unique insights into God and his character through prayer that others do not yet have, or having seen God move in miraculous ways through prayer that YOU prayed. In particular intercessors can easily be drawn into the feeling that they are God’s ‘inner circle’ and have more insight than others and are therefore superior. This is always destructive.
- Judgmentalism – Focused prayer may give you “prophetic” insights or observations about a co-worker, a ministry, or the people group or community among whom you are ministering, and if you are not careful you may allow yourself to fall into the sin of judging harshly in your spirit, rather than using those insights to pray with mercy and tears.

God calls his intercessors to radical holiness. This does not mean that you cannot engage in a life of focused prayer if you are struggling with besetting sins, but it does mean that you need to have a heart that is actively pursuing purity and hungering for it. As you grow in holiness, you will grow in prayer. It is not the only thing that will help you grow in prayer, but it is one of the main things.

If you are struggling with sin that will not easily go away, then you should seek immediate counsel and accountability from a leader, your spouse, or a trusted friend. Do not underestimate the seriousness of your situation. Focused prayer and spiritual warfare can be very dangerous when undertaken while actively involved in areas of sin and darkness.

At the same time, there is hope in your struggle. Many times, the sin issue may not have been overcome until now due to an inadequate focus of attention on overcoming the sin, and using God’s tools. Do not drop out of an active prayer life due to besetting sins in your life, but continue to pray *as* you declare total war in your spirit against the sin, and seek the Holy Spirit’s help to overcome it.

Initially, a daily focus on the sin (alongside an even greater daily focus on Jesus, and feeding on the Word of God) is important. Begin each day with the “four R’s”:

- **Repenting:** If the sin still has active control in your life, bring this in repentance to the Lord, and receive forgiveness from Him each and every time you fail. If you fail throughout the day, return immediately to Him in repentance the very moment that you fall in sin.
- **Renouncing:** Actively declare out loud, before God, angels, and demons, that you renounce the sin of _____, and that you choose to hate this sin, and have nothing to do with it. Even if you just renounced the sin yesterday, actively renounce it each day. This is a key act of war in which you wilfully align your own spirit and soul with God's truth and will for you.
- **Rebuking:** Often the role of demons, curses, and generational iniquity in *inciting* habitual sin is underestimated. You are still responsible for your choices, but there may be spiritual powers that are working as hard as possible to nurture and maintain your state of bondage, and influence the decisions of your will. You can deal with these through praying something like "If there are any spirits, demons, curses, or generational sins that are assigned to incite me to the sin of _____, in Jesus' name I cancel their assignments and command them to silence. They may not influence me in any way".
- **Re-committing:** It is important to understand also that your choice to sin or not sin is a choice of *loyalty*. By choosing to sin, you are defaulting your loyalty to demons (this fact should cause you to return to God in repentance even more quickly). By choosing to not sin, you are giving your allegiance to God. Take a moment to verbalize your love and devotion to Jesus, and your choice to give your loyalty to Him and Him alone.

6.7.b Give and Receive Forgiveness

A lack of forgiveness has historically been one of the main ways in which powers of darkness have kept the church from becoming the dynamic force in prayer that God intended it to be.

While the lack of forgiveness is itself a failure in purity (see above paragraphs), it deserves specific recognition due to the great destructive impact it has had on the mission and identity of the church throughout the ages. For those who are seeking to push forward in the area of prayer, special attention should be given to keeping short accounts with others, and neither withholding forgiveness nor failing to seek forgiveness from others when necessary. When one believer withholds forgiveness from another, the scripture says that (among other things):

1. Our worship and prayers are not acceptable to God (Matt. 18:21-35)
2. Our prayers are hindered (Matt. 18:19, Mark 11:24-25)
3. Bitterness and unbelief spring up (Heb. 12:14-15)

With these outcomes, it is no wonder that lack of forgiveness is one of the key points of access that the enemy tries to gain in his efforts to destroy or limit Strategic Prayer. Be on your guard, and do not to allow this to happen.

Story: Whenever the priests wanted to go into the Holy of Holies they had to shed the blood of animals and present it to the Lord as an atonement for their sins and the sins of the people. I believe that every time we have a time of prayer we should ask the Lord to cleanse us from all sin through faith in His shed blood. It is a good habit to get into as we minister before the Lord as priests.

We should always live in complete forgiveness with all men everywhere. As you enter to pray, forgive all men everywhere with all your heart. One day the Lord just blatantly told us, "I can't come and be with you today." We said, "Why not Lord, what's wrong?" He said, "Do you see those two young men sitting over there? They have sinned against me!" So I took them into my office and asked them about it. Sure enough they had to leave the meeting that day and get things right. One of

the reasons that the ministry of “Undivided Hearts” had to precede the ministry of the Strategic Prayer Equipping Group was to have a people who were holy before the Lord. Holiness is essential to prevailing intercession.

6.7.c Cultivate Hope

One of the “occupational dangers” of engaging in focused, persistent prayer for a community is that the daily barrage of bad spiritual news from that community can wear down your sense of optimism, hope, and faith that God will indeed fulfil His promises among that people. This can happen even when the Kingdom of God is advancing (see Matt. 11:2-6).

Hope is a critical component of the intercessor’s outlook and perspective. Hope is the bridge between faith – believing that God will do all he has promised – and love – the grace of God poured out in the life of the intercessor to give his or her life on behalf of the people for whom they are praying. It is possible to pray with faith, but to have a heart that is dry and empty of love. This kind of prayer rarely sees notable results for the Kingdom of God, but can (and often is) maintained for the sake of “faithfulness”.

In order to keep love’s fire burning fresh in your heart, you need to cultivate *hope*. Hope is the ability to not only believe that God *can* move among the people for whom you are praying, it is also the ability to see that God *is in fact* moving in response to your prayers and actively bringing about the things you pray for on behalf of the people. It is having spiritual eyes to recognize the process God is using to save a people for himself from among those for whom you are praying.

Hope can be cultivated in a number of ways. Times of focused worship and lingering in the presence of God (without interceding for anyone or anything) are helpful. Spending time in the Word and interacting with the Word on a personal level and as a prayer team are also vital. It is also important to think about and discuss the answers to prayer that God has provided, and the positive aspects of what is happening spiritually in your community.

6.7.d Rest Appropriately

The apostolic ministry of prayer is intense, and can be quite tiring. People who pray little may criticize people who pray a lot by saying or implying that they do not work very hard. As anyone who has laboured before the Lord in prayer on behalf of a community knows, however, the opposite is true. Wrestling in prayer (Col. 4:12) can be exhausting.

The challenge that will face you when you commit to prayer and face tiredness or exhaustion will likely be one of two common errors:

1. Not resting when the Holy Spirit directs you to rest. There will be seasons where God leads you to a place of rest, and allows you to leave the wrestling in prayer with Him for a while (Ps. 23:2-3). This kind of rest is the rest of peace and faith, and is good. Not placing your subject(s) of prayer in God’s hand when He directs you to is disobedience, and will not only decrease the effectiveness of your prayers, but will also lead to emotional and spiritual burnout.

2. Resting beyond the season of rest that God tells you to take. While God does give times of rest and refreshing, He also calls us to *actively* participate in the expansion of His Kingdom through prayer. Take the time of rest that you need to refocus, but heed the promptings of the Holy Spirit when He tells you that it is time to get back to the battle. Not doing so can open you up to a spirit of laziness and compromise. Do not be like King David, who after years of successful military campaigning decided to extend a natural winter rest period into a prolonged absence from the battlefield God had called him to (1 Chron. 20:1). Before long, he found himself broken and fallen in the sins of adultery and murder.

6.7.e Focus on Jesus

This is a simple but important point – to keep the focus on Jesus. When praying about problems in a community, or seeking to break the power of the enemy over a specific group of people in bondage, it is easy to get more focused on the problems and on the enemy than on Jesus.

Our prayers are to always be lifted to God himself, in the name of Jesus, with confidence and joy and thanksgiving in His presence (Eph. 5:19-20). Stay focused on Jesus – His power, His provision, His death and resurrection, His coming back, His victory over all powers of darkness. Let Jesus fill your prayers. Fill your prayer times with much worship.

6.7.f Do not neglect action

One final area of danger to be avoided is the neglect of practical service and ministry while being focused on Strategic Prayer. Apostolic prayer goes hand in hand with apostolic ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4), and both are a part of the basic job description of an apostle (and by extension, apostolic teams). There are many different ways by which the balance between the ministry in the seen realm and the ministry in the unseen realm can be worked out, but the bottom line is that both aspects of ministry should be present. There are times when we should stop praying and start doing!

This does not mean that we should abandon prayer when we feel frustrated about the “impracticality” of it. This can sometimes happen, often in response to the subtle criticisms of others who do not see the “practical” value of prayer. We need to resist this line of thought. The expression “he’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good” does *not* line up with scripture (see Colossians 3:2, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:17). After explaining to His disciples (apostles-to-be) about how “they should always pray and not give up”, Jesus asks the question, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus will be looking for people who “always pray and not give up” when he returns.

However, as we pray we need to *also* be engaged in practical ways with the world around us, ministering in real ways to the needs of people. We are not to neglect the ministry of the Word, lest the Message is not heard (Rom. 10:14). We are not to shut our ears to the cry of the poor, lest God refuses to listen to our prayers (Prov. 21:13). And we are not to keep praying about an issue when God has already given us clear instruction in regard to it (Joshua 7:10).

As a general trend, we have tended to err more on the side of not praying enough. However, as God continues to equip us more and more in apostolic prayer, we will need to make sure that we do not simply swing the pendulum to the other extreme and neglect the area of hands-on ministry in the seen realm. Both aspects are essential.

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6.8 Guard your children

As we take our nation before the Lord, we need to remember to constantly cover our children in prayer. The enemy hunts down the weak, and often we are weakest when we are very young, or when the father or parents of the family are away. Again, viewing warfare Scriptures through the Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 10 interpretation, we can pray for protection for our children. In addition to using Scriptures like those below to pray for our children, we can pray prayers each evening for protection for their bodies, souls and spirits, for cleansing of their rooms, and for the breaking of any curses or spells spoken toward them. (In so many of the countries where we work, cursing and casting spells are common practices.)

Ps. 10:2, Ps. 12:5,7, Ps. 82:4, Is. 40:29-31, Ps. 59:1, John 17:15, 2 Thes. 3:3, Deut. 23:5

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6.9 Prayer shield

It is also very important that others are praying for our protection. It is good if each intercessor can have a ‘prayer shield’ in place. This could be a group of close friends who commit themselves to praying regularly for us. Or it may be a network of trusted people who we regularly send prayer needs to maybe on an email network.

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6.10 Don’t leave in the middle of the battle – finish it

Engaging in Strategic Prayer on behalf of a community is not a quick and easy task. You will have times when you wonder why you entered into this, or why you are seeing no results. The enemy will tempt you to despair, and try to make you think that you will never make any difference.

Do not leave the battle before it is done. All of these discouragements are temporary. God rewards those who persevere, and you have an opportunity to rewrite history as you re-shape the unseen realm through prayer. Finish the task.

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