

## **Spiritual Warfare** by John Hanna

The term “spiritual warfare” implies that we are involved in a war in the spiritual rather than the temporal realm. Ephesians 6 :10-12 speaks of this struggle:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

As we engage in intercession, we will inevitably be engaging in spiritual warfare. Overall, this is not the main focus of our intercession. Our focus is on God, His plans and purposes and how He desires to bring them about. Our human sin is probably the major obstacle we face, and this is dealt with through confession and repentance, either personally or “representationally” as Moses, Daniel and Samuel did when they prayed for their people, who had sinned against God. At the same time, we have an enemy who hates us, hates God and will do what he can to interfere with God's work.

### **This warfare takes place on several fronts.**

1. We will deal with attacks against us personally. This can be internal (condemning thoughts, attacks of lust or despair, etc.) or external (illness, slander, computers fail while writing a manual about prayer, etc.)
2. As we intercede, we will become aware of some of the strategies of the enemy working against whatever we are praying about.

When faced with the reality of spiritual warfare, there are two common temptations: fear and fascination. In order to avoid either of these, we need to look to Scripture for advice on how to deal with this warfare.

### **Facing attacks that come against us personally**

James 4:7-8 *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*

We will not win a battle with the devil because we are stronger, more skilled with words, or more clever than he is. We are to 'submit... to God,' "Come near to God" and in between, "Resist the devil". Spiritual warfare does not begin with a clash of weapons, but with strengthening our relationship with God. Are we walking in obedience? Are we spending time with the Lord? Are we in intimate relationship with Him?

The scriptures give us some words of prayerful encouragement:

- Ps. 17:8-9 *“Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me.”*
- Ps. 61 :3-4 *“for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!”*
- ps. 91 :4-6 *“He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.”*

- Isaiah 54:17 “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord...”

### **Resisting the devil**

2 Cor.10:3-5 says: “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”

The battle ultimately doesn't take place outside of us, but in our minds. If the enemy is able to intimidate, frighten or discourage us, he has the upper hand. If we resist him, firm in our faith and keep going forward in spite of spiritual attack, the Lord will deliver us.

I Peter 5:8-11 tells us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Notice that we don't have a promise that God will protect us from all suffering. Don't give up at the first sign of attack. Persevere and cling to God. Be aware of these attacks, but do not focus on them too much. I think of it as walking through a field where explosions are going off. We need to avoid the landmines, and keep walking forward. Often this type of warfare seems to get particularly intense when beginning some new thrust or doing something very strategic in ministry. When our computers don't work - pray and then try to fix the problem or get around it. It is amazing how these problems seem to clear up once the ministry event is past. When there are relational conflicts, do what needs to be done immediately, but don't let that distract you from your main focus. Often, it is a mind game. The enemy will try to discourage and distract us. He will take advantage of any physical, spiritual or emotional weak place in us or our organization. It seems like God sometimes allows these attacks to expose areas of weakness so that we will deal with them. It becomes even more important to spend time worshiping and drawing close to God.

### **Entering into warfare during intercession**

When we run into demonic opposition or strongholds we begin in the same place as we did with a personal spiritual attack:

1. Submit to God - this command has some specific applications in relation to intercession
  - a. Seek the Lord's guidance as to whether or not you are to engage in warfare in any given situation. Just because we are aware of a demonic stronghold, does not mean we are meant to engage it.
  - b. Seek the Lord's guidance for His battle plan. The Israelites often received very specific instruction before engaging in battle. Sometimes they were instructed to send in spies, at other times to consecrate themselves, or reduce their numbers, or march around the city 7 times. In human terms, some of these instructions made sense, others did not. But, each time victory depended on their being obedient to God's instructions. When dealing with a particular stronghold, the Holy Spirit will often lead us to identify and deal with pillars that hold it in place – for instance, some of the pillars under racism are fear, hatred, and pride - We need to deal with those before addressing the stronghold head-on.

- c. Seek the Lord's guidance for timing. God's plans are often more far-reaching than we can see. He is best able to decide when our piece of intercession will intersect with other pieces of his plan
2. Resist the devil - Ephesians 6:10-18 name the parts of our armor that we have to have in place as we enter into warfare: truth, righteousness (in Jesus), gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the word of God. We are then instructed to pray.
3. Come near to God - Worship is one of the more powerful forms of spiritual warfare. Rather than focusing on the power of the enemy, acknowledge and proclaim the holiness, power and sovereignty of God.

### **What weapons did Jesus use?**

In Luke 4:1-12 we have a record of a direct confrontation between Jesus and the devil. Jesus was fasting and praying and consistently responded to the devil by quoting Scripture. Notice that this was not just random recitation, but an application of Scriptural truth to the specific temptations spoken to Jesus. Whether facing personal attack or facing demonic opposition in intercession, stand on the Word of God. Speak it, meditate on it, and search the Scriptures for evidence of God's mind and promises that are relevant to the situation you are facing.

### **Every army needs backup support**

Those at the frontlines of a battle always have others behind them collecting supplies, providing medical care, etc. When you enter into spiritual battle, you also need others behind you. It is very important to have people praying for us and along with us. Some may be praying for us personally - for protection, wisdom in the battle, etc. Others will be interceding for the situation we are praying for, but from a distance. When we get caught up in and worn out by the details of a situation, it may be easier for others to see the bigger picture and identify what God's word has to say that is relevant to our situation and pray it. Paul many times asked for others to pray for him and with him.

A final note - for some, there is an exhilaration that comes during and after the battle. We rejoice in God's victory in any situation, but remember Jesus' caution, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:20