

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

WHEN *the* WARFARE MOVES *from* NATURAL
to SUPERNATURAL

DEALING with ✠ HINDERING SPIRITS

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with
HINDERING
SPIRITS

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DEALING WITH HINDERING SPIRITS

Published by Voice of Evangelism Ministries P. O. Box 3595
Cleveland, TN 37320
423.478.3456

www.voe.org

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Cover design by Michael Dutton Revised Second Edition 2013
ISBN 978-0-9785920-0-4

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INTRODUCTION

In the earliest years of my ministry, if I had not received proper instruction from mature and competent ministers, I could have been overwhelmed with trials and frustrations and possibly aborted God's assignment for me, even before the age of nineteen. I was spending extended times in fasting and countless hours shut behind the door of a bedroom or small office, praying and studying. Nobody had informed me that this type of lifestyle would eventually tap into both sides of the spirit world—the favor of the Kingdom of God, as well as attacks from the kingdom of darkness.

I was already familiar with the spirit realm, because we have a lineage of four generations of ministers of the Gospel in our family, and Dad was an intense prayer warrior who was constantly speaking of a dream, vision, or special visitation from the Holy Spirit. He was truly a man of God, and we expected this kind of thing from him. But I was a teenager—often referred to as a kid preacher—and the last thing I expected as a young, inexperienced exhorter was a six-month mental onslaught from the kingdom of darkness. At my age, I was untested in that sort of thing.

But I didn't stay untested for long. Within three years of the time I preached my first sermon, I encountered the supernatural side of spiritual warfare. After enduring six months of mental torment, harassment and negative thoughts, the Holy Spirit

would use that situation to reveal several important and liberating truths that have sustained me in battle to this day.

The Holy Spirit impressed me to place these lessons, personal stories, and Biblical truths into a book so that people will have a spiritual resource to help them prepare and deal with sudden supernatural attacks. In this book I share my own testimony of victory over a very real enemy.

One of the great apostles in the New Testament was targeted by a hindering spirit. His revelation of God's grace will help us overcome these conflicts and live a life that is free from tormenting attacks. May these lessons help you and be a source of strength in your personal life.

God Bless You,

Perry Stone, Jr.

Founder and President of the Voice of Evangelism Outreach
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CHAPTER 1

TAPPING INTO THE SPIRIT WORLD

“Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days...”

– Daniel 10:12-13

AT A YOUNG age I knew that I was called into the ministry. Beginning in my mid-teens, my social life and my desires were far different from those of my peers. They were excited about ball games, weekend parties, or some new pill they tried. I was sixteen years of age, wearing polyester pants and carrying a large Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible under my arm. I was not attempting to be different or stand out as a sore

thumb. My heart's desires were simply different. I never dated a girl from a public school because we didn't have anything in common. My only friends were Christian youth from our church or other churches in the area. At times it was a lonely road.

In 1976 my life was changed by an event that, while unscheduled on my calendar, was undoubtedly prearranged in ages past on God's calendar. Following a Sunday night service, I was sitting with three men enjoying cake and coffee in our parsonage next door to the church in Salem, Virginia where my father served as pastor. Dad always had a way of stirring faith when he shared stories of powerful answers to prayer and miracles he had seen and experienced during his ministry. The four of us sat and marveled as Dad related one remarkable story after another, and built our faith, layer upon layer, like a mason laying bricks and stones.

After a couple of hours, all four of us became hungry to encounter God in this manner. As a strong desire to touch God's presence overwhelmed us, I stood and said, "I believe the Lord would have us go to the church and pray!" This was just before eleven o'clock.

Without hesitation, Wayne, Carlton, Ted and I raced across the parking lot to the church, unlocked the door, and headed to the sanctuary. We fell on our knees and began to pray. Minutes turned into hours. At three o'clock in the morning the awesome presence of God filled every inch of the entire church. My hair stood on end and I could feel God's anointing, like warm oil pouring over me. I stood up and opened a side door to step outdoors into the cool mountain air. As I looked up into the black curtain of sky that was sprinkled with stars, I felt an inner

nudge that I know as the voice of the Lord telling me, “I have called you to preach.”

I stepped back into the church, and around three-thirty in the morning announced to my friends, “I believe the Lord just called me to preach the Gospel.” Their comments were along the lines of, “That’s nice,” and “Well, we will see.”

Previously I assumed that anybody called by God into the ministry would experience a dynamic visitation—perhaps from a glowing angel that caused them to fall to the ground, or a booming voice speaking in 1611 King James English and saying, “Yeah, the Lord doeth call thee into His vineyard.” But that night there were no visible angels and no burning bushes or loud voices. There was just a still, small, inner voice similar to what we read in 1 Kings 19:11-13. When on the mountain Elijah heard God, not in the fire and thunder, and not in an earthquake; but in a still small voice.

GOD’S CALL ATTRACTS THE ENEMY’S ATTENTION

From that moment in 1976, my heart was firm that I was to preach the Gospel; not because the path behind me included three ministers in our family, but because the path before me was a destiny predetermined by God. Yet, instead of a smooth paved path, I immediately encountered thorns, roadblocks, and spiritual hindrances. In retrospect, it was the pattern of people in the Bible. *The conflict always precedes the conquest!*

At times there is a crushing before a crowning. Often your greatest battles come before your greatest blessings. Before

David was crowned king of Zion, he was crushed at Ziklag as we read in 1 Samuel chapter 30. Often *testing precedes triumph*. Before Christ began His public ministry and triumphed over Satan's works, he was tested by Satan for forty days. Near death can also precede deliverance, as when Satan attempted to kill the Hebrew male children before their deliverer ascended to his position (Exodus chapter 1). Thus it is not surprising that some addicts face death's door, and then suddenly the hand of God snatches them from the grip of destruction. Herod slew the infants under the age of two in and around Bethlehem as he attempted to snuff out the life of a future King of the Jews. Yet Christ was spared when Joseph followed a warning dream (Matthew chapter 2).

When you are on the edge of your purpose, the ledge upon which you stand might begin to shake. You will either stand still and wait upon the Lord or run away in fear from your appointed assignments. This battle for God's will in our life begins early. It can begin at the moment of birth, and sometimes even before birth as the enemy encourages people to abort the child before the child ever has a chance to fulfill an assignment.

Parents, understand that the spiritual conflict for your children begins early. It might manifest visibly in their teen years, but the seeds were planted and the strategies of the enemy laid out much earlier than that. I am uncertain how much the adversary understands about our future—although he surely knows that God has a predetermined plan for each person—but it seems that the spirit realm is aware of certain destinies that God has planned. As a result, the enemy engages evil spirits to halt those destinies. He will use ungodly

people and negative circumstances to circumvent the plans of the Heavenly Father for a person's life.

THE INDIAN MASSACRE

Years ago, in the mountains of Tazewell in Southwestern Virginia, Cherokee Indians were encamped and living peacefully along the banks of the river. An unidentified group of people came across the camp and slaughtered the Indians. Shortly thereafter, a man with the last name Christian was riding his horse and came across the horrible scene. He heard an infant crying and found a little Indian girl who was cradled in the arms of her dead mother. He took the child home and the family raised her. When she grew up, she married and gave birth to a girl named Nalvie.

Nalvie grew up and married William. They lived in Johnny Cake Hollow in a log cabin about two and a half miles from the main road, not far from Bartley, West Virginia.

Early in the morning on February 11, 1933, Nalvie went into labor with her third child. William set out to walk about seven miles through freezing cold snow to find a doctor at the coal mining camp. The first doctor he found was immediately called on another case, and since he was obligated to the coal company that hired him, he had to give preference to the employees of that company. William continued another seven miles to Yukon where he found a Dr. Hatfield. This doctor had a Model-A Ford, so he drove William to the bottom of the hollow where a neighbor was waiting with a horse. The doctor rode the horse, and Williams walked to the log cabin. He later confessed that he thought he would freeze to death before he

returned home with a doctor.

As they approached the house, Nalvie, who had already given birth, was standing at the door yelling to her husband, “Grab her! She has the baby!”

To their shock, the woman who had assisted in the delivery had wrapped the baby in the blanket and was headed into the freezing, snowy outdoors. William and the doctor grabbed the woman and wrestled the child from her arms. She was shouting, “This is my baby! God gave me this baby!” Had William and the doctor arrived just a few minutes later, the woman would have disappeared with the five pound bundle.

Wrapped in that blanket on a cold wintry day was a baby whom the doctor wanted to help name. Many years later that child, Perry Fred Stone, would become my father. Dad said that he believed the enemy placed a fiery dart in the mind of the midwife in an attempt to abort God’s sovereign plan for both our ministries.

This story reminds me of how Pharaoh instructed the Egyptian midwives to allow the Hebrew women to deliver their children on the birthing stool, and if the baby was a male child, he should be killed. After the birth of Moses, his mother prepared a small ark made of reeds, and placed her son into the waters of the Nile River (Exodus 2:3). Satan’s plan to disrupt the prophetic destiny of Israel failed when Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses and raised him in the palace of the king of Egypt. Divine purpose is able to preserve you, if you will find shelter in the ark of God’s presence.

WHAT DOES THE ENEMY KNOW

Can the kingdom of darkness actually be aware of certain future plans of God for a person? Is it possible for spirits in the kingdom of darkness to tap into conversations of angels in the heavenly realm? Many questions can be asked, but they are difficult to answer. We know that God has a divine purpose for each of us, so we are all targets of the enemy.

However, after years of ministry, I do believe that the kingdom of darkness hears plans and prophecies that are publicly discussed. Perhaps he even makes destructive plans based on prayers that we pray.

Jesus was aware of His sufferings prior to His crucifixion. The Bible tells us that, if the princes of the world had known that Christ's death and resurrection would lead to their defeat, they never would have crucified Him (1 Cor. 2:8). Perhaps this is why Jesus only revealed bits and pieces of God's plan publicly. Toward the time of His death, Jesus told His disciples, *"From henceforth I will not talk much with you, because the prince of this world is coming and hath nothing in me"* (John 14:30). Jesus was not going to expose God's ultimate plan of defeat to the enemy. He would conquer by silence, keeping His enemy unaware of God's full agenda.

Jesus lived in Nazareth from His early childhood until He was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). During His public baptism, the Father announced, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17). Immediately following that announcement, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness "to be tempted of the devil forty days" (Luke 4:2). God announced that Jesus was His Son and Satan challenged Christ's position. Three times Satan demanded proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

Forty-two months later, men assembled at the foot of the cross and still challenged Jesus, questioning if He were God's Son (Matt. 27:37-40). Once the Father proclaimed Jesus as His Son, a war of opinions emerged and continues even to this day. When people are asked who Jesus is, some identify Him as a figment of historical imagination, while others think of Him as a teacher or a mere prophet. Believers, however, know Him as the Son of God.

WARRING WITH THE WORD

The apostle Paul gave a prophecy over his spiritual son, Timothy, and appointed him as pastor of the church at Ephesus. Some estimate that this church had over 100,000 members. Timothy had received anointed prophetic instructions related to God's will, and elders in the church started rumors that Timothy was too young to be pastoring such a congregation. These older people were intimidating the younger Timothy.

Paul told Timothy not to rebuke the elders, and he said that God did not give him a spirit of fear (or intimidation). He also gave Timothy this instruction: *"This charge I commit until thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare"* (1 Timothy 1:18).

Paul instructed him to remember the prophecies and not allow the enemy to steal the assignment God had given him. This is called going to war with the prophetic word.

For years people have said, "When I began to publicly declare God's plans for my life, it seemed the attacks of hell

broke out against me.” Early in my ministry I noticed that, when a young man felt a call of God to preach and would publicly state such, he would often encounter severe opposition and strange warfare, often within a few weeks. Many times unexpected trouble led a novice down a previously untraveled road of discouragement and frustration, causing the young man to doubt God’s calling. Some were unable to handle the conflict and eventually made shipwreck of their faith.

IT REALLY DOESN’T MATTER

Even if the enemy is aware of your assignment, it really doesn’t matter. If you are called of the Lord, He is not going to revoke the gifts and calling: *“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance”* (Romans 11:29).

In life we have conflicts, and spiritual callings attract spiritual attacks. You and I will always be fighting something—someone’s opinions, bad attitudes, hindrances, evil spirits, spiritual opposition, and persecution. This is why we must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3). If you have the attention of the enemy, you also have the attention of God. If God is with you, who can be against you?

I was eighteen years of age when I became personally aware of the fact that a battle always precedes a breakthrough. I was completely unprepared for what I would encounter.

CHAPTER 2

SIX MONTHS OF TORMENT

*“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*

– 2 Timothy 1:7

AS A YOUNG minister, I assumed that fasting, much prayer, and near constant Bible study would somehow hedge me in and exempt me from certain attacks of the enemy. I reasoned that if my faith was strong and I was “prayed up,” then certainly this alone would form a protective hedge around me. But shortly after entering full-time ministry, I tapped into a realm of the spirit world that I had only read about.

It began in a small mountain community in Weyanoke, West Virginia. I was eighteen years of age and was traveling full time as an evangelist. For several months I had spent entire days fasting, many hours a day studying the Bible and reading other religious books, and recording Biblical nuggets on yellow legal note pads. I was extremely hungry for God’s presence in the revivals and I had a burden for the lost. I became consumed with really knowing God and not just knowing about Him.

One night in July of 1978, I returned from a revival service, went to my room in the church parsonage, and fell across the bed, exhausted. Within minutes I felt a strange uneasy presence, like a dark vapor, slip into the room. At that instant I was overcome with a dizzy sensation as the walls appeared to be moving in toward me. I prayed, but the unwelcome presence lingered for a while, until finally I fell into a deep sleep. At the time I thought it was a strange experience, and I soon brushed it off.

Several weeks later I was ministering at my grandfather's church in Gorman, Maryland. My grandparents lived in Davis, West Virginia, a small community in the northeastern part of the state. Late one night I slipped into bed and within three minutes, I thought I was lying on a bed of bugs. It felt as though hundreds of small insects were crawling over my legs. I flung back the covers and turned on the light, only to discover that the sheets were white and spotless with not a bug in sight. I turned off the light and returned to bed, only to experience the same manifestation. The second time was enough. I jumped from the bed, grabbed a pillow, and slept on the couch.

I reasoned that this was some strange phenomenon that would pass. I reasoned incorrectly.

THE DARK PRESENCE RETURNS

From there I returned home to Salem, Virginia. Again I entrenched myself in intensive study and prayer, oftentimes up to fifteen hours a day. At the time my bedroom was turned into my personal study, equipped with a desk, chair, and a large stack of books, Bibles, and research material. Late one night I

had been studying, and I turned off the light and crawled into one of the bunk beds in the room that my brother and I shared.

Within a few moments a dark and eerie presence entered the room. This time it was so tangible that I felt I could reach out and touch it. I began to rebuke the presence in the name of Jesus, and in an instant the presence lifted.

The following night the same manifestation occurred, and the dark presence veiled the atmosphere. This was not my imagination, but it was a tangible presence in the room. This time it did not depart when I rebuked it. Instead, it seemed to linger until the presence slowly lifted from the room.

I was uncertain what this was. I had been a Christian since I was a child and had never encountered such a real, yet invisible presence. A mild fear would overtake me when this force was near. I had spent ample time studying the Scriptures related to the supernatural realm of evil spirits, but I had little knowledge to personally deal with an evil presence that seemingly came and went at will. This led me into a detailed and complex study of the spirit world. I thought that arming myself with this information would shield me from whatever this was. Instead, these strange visitations continued and even increased.

One morning I was awakened by a loud buzzing noise in my ears. I became aware of an odd sensation that I was unable to move or speak. Immediately I heard deep male voices that were cursing me and using every profanity imaginable. This was not my imagination, but it was very real and I had no idea how to stop it. Still unable to speak, I began to rebuke these evil spirits in my mind. It worked. My body was loosed and silence followed; but the manifestation of voices began to reoccur

every few weeks.

THE SPIRITS BECAME VISIBLE

These strange attacks became more frequent and included the buzzing noises, the helpless sensation of being paralyzed, and the audible voices that mocked, cursed Jesus Christ and the Bible, and threatened me with physical harm. Again, let me emphasize that this was not the effect of an overworked imagination. It was very real.

Eventually the attacks moved to a new level. Late one night the evil presence came into the room and awakened me from my sleep. For the first time, I saw what I was dealing with. The presence was covered with a dark shroud, similar to a long, thick robe that might be worn by someone deeply involved in the occult. The face was dark and a dark hood surrounded the head and covered part of the face. This physical manifestation shrouded me in the worst kind of fear I had ever experienced. Although the manifestation lasted only a few seconds, I was frozen in fear. I turned on the light and was unable to sleep.

I thought that perhaps these were seasonal attacks and they would soon pass. Again I was wrong. These invasions from another realm only increased. Soon they would awaken me throughout the night; often, two or three times a week this tormenting force would manifest. Strange sounds, voices, footsteps, and physical manifestations became my unwelcomed visitors.

WHY WAS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

As these troubling attacks persisted, there were several things I knew for a fact. I knew that I was called to preach and no amount of intimidation was going to change my mind. I knew that I was living right and was not opening a door for the enemy to operate. And I knew that, sooner or later, like Job, I would receive some explanation for why this was happening.

Yet these three facts did not change the questions that haunted my mind and were not being answered as the weeks turned into months. Why was this happening to me, but it wasn't happening to anybody else I knew? What could be the purpose for the Lord allowing this to go on and on?

Would I encounter this regularly for the rest of my life? This third question troubled me the most. I became deceived into thinking that these demonic manifestations would be something I would encounter for the remaining days of my life and ministry. I began to believe that this was my thorn in the flesh, and the Lord was going to allow this spirit to follow and torment me for some unknown reason. In fact, I began to expect these attacks on a regular basis. Needless to say, if you expect the enemy to show up in your house, he will gladly do so.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

Finally I went to my father and explained to him what I was encountering. He immediately discerned that it was a supernatural attack from a demonic spirit. He felt that since I was fasting and praying, the Lord was opening my eyes to see into the very real, but normally unseen spirit world. This still did not answer the questions that hounded me: What is the purpose for this? What am I supposed to learn from this?"

Five months after the initial attack, I was ministering at the church of Pastor Jim Angle in Blacksburg, Virginia. Jim was a unique man of God whose ministry focused on deliverance and healing. After detailing the events, Jim looked at me and said, “Perry, the Lord has been boasting about your dedication to Him, as He did with Job, and Satan has said to the Lord, ‘Let me test Perry.’ That is what’s going on. You are being tested for a season.”

Jim’s observation put steel in my back and set my face as a flint to endure and eventually overcome these intrusions. I knew that the Bible teaches spiritual authority over all the powers of the enemy, and it reveals that when Jesus rebuked Satan, the enemy departed from Him (Luke 4:13). I was fully aware of the scriptures that promised spiritual authority. Yet, I also knew that, according to the book of Job, there are seasons when God allows a person to be tested.

Could the enemy frighten me away from fasting and praying? Would I back away from preaching on defeating the enemy and gaining victory in spiritual warfare? Was this a form of spiritual intimidation to make me say, “I don’t want to have a global ministry if I have to deal with these tormenting spirits?”

THE ROAR OF THE LION

I once read where the roar of a lion can be heard up to one mile away. One researcher noted that the roar of a lion can even paralyze some animals with fear. They literally cannot move because the roar is so intimidating. I realized the supernatural voices, cursing, and other manifestations were the roar of the lion, and his plan was to grip me with fear. The Bible warns us:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

– 1 PETER 5:8

This was important because the enemy will gain an advantage over us if we remain ignorant of his schemes and strategies (2 Corinthians 2:11). One day I seized onto a verse of scripture that I read, and it became my rope to hold on to:

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

– 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

Deep inside, I knew that these tormenting manifestations could not last forever. God would make a way of escape. For six months, from July to the end of December, I lived a life of mental torment. At the same time, I was seeing great revivals in churches throughout the east coast.

THE LORD CAME INTO THE ROOM

After several months I found myself dreading the night. I often slept with a light on, or played Gospel music on a stereo until I could fall asleep. Finally, it was December 31, 1978 and the Christmas season was in full swing. Mom’s relatives were staying with us in Salem, Virginia. My brother and I were sleeping downstairs in the room we shared, where our twin

beds were opposite from each another. I recall praying and asking the Lord to not allow one more demonic spirit to manifest. A new year was coming, and I was expecting a new anointing and a fresh touch from the Lord.

Shortly after midnight, I lay down and rested in peace for the first time in weeks. But in the night, I was abruptly awakened when a hand violently jerked my right leg as if attempting to pull me out of the bed! I assumed that my brother, Phillip, was playing a prank on me. I sat up and could see the night light and the digital clock, which read three o'clock in the morning. Turning to the right I saw the outline of my brother lying in his bed.

Then something happened that is difficult to explain. Within three feet from my face, I saw the face of a handsome man. His features were perfect and his eyes were full of compassion. I thought an angel of the Lord had entered the room. Then suddenly, the face became contorted with an evil stare, followed by a hollow demonic laughter. This was no angel of God! It was the visible face of a fierce evil spirit that was literally laughing at me. I knew what the Bible meant by this verse: *"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14).

At that moment, something broke forth inside of me. Instead of panicking and wanting to hide under the covers, I began to scream out of my spirit (not with my voice, but with my mind), "No! You will no longer torment me! I have had enough! No more!" My inner spirit man was rising up against this force. I realized later that it was the Holy Spirit within me that was rising up. As the Bible says, *"Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered"* (Psalms 68:1).

At that instant, I heard a voice—a voice from within, yet it was audible to my spiritual ears. The Holy Spirit spoke to my spirit, saying, *“Son, as long as you live, Satan will use what you see and what you hear against you. It is time that you stand on the only thing that can never be shaken or changed. Stand upon my Word!”*

Instantly the shaking ceased and the image of this face of wickedness evaporated into thin air. A surge of peace and fresh anointing filled my spirit. I felt as though a huge weight had been lifted. The atmosphere cleared and peace flooded the room.

That was 1979, on the first day of a new year. That particular series of attacks has never been repeated. I would face other spiritual battles along my journey, but those demonic manifestations ceased following the revelation from the Holy Spirit.

THE LESSONS I LEARNED

When the Holy Spirit said, “Satan will use what you see and what you hear against you,” I was reminded of Peter, who stepped out of the boat and walked on water toward Jesus. What held Peter up? Answer: the Word.

In Matthew 14:29, Jesus said one word to Peter: “Come.” That one word held up a Hebrew who could have weighed a couple hundred pounds! But Peter began to observe the strong winds and notice that the waves were getting higher. When he lost faith in the Word, he began to fail.

After I received this word from the Lord, I realized that I was

being moved by what I felt and saw. If the attendance was high in my revivals, I expected a great revival. But if the crowds were small, I anticipated little. If I felt good, I could minister effectively; but if I felt depressed, then I was hindered. I was being moved by what I felt, saw and heard.

Months later I read a statement by Smith Wigglesworth that summed up the lesson the Holy Spirit taught me. Wigglesworth once said, “I am not moved by what I see. I am not moved by what I feel. I am moved by what I believe!” The Lord knew that I could never experience the level of growth He desired for me if I was always being moved by what I felt or didn’t feel, and by what I saw or didn’t see. God wanted me to rely upon the power of His Word! This is why I would often spend so many hours a day studying the Word. We must fill ourselves with the Word of God.

In the Bible, Jesus was moved with compassion, but never by circumstances (Matthew 9:36). If there was a lack of food, He multiplied a boy’s lunch and fed a multitude (Matthew 15:34-38). Death did not intimidate him. Christ ruined funerals by raising the person from the dead (Luke 7:11-15).

The second great lesson I learned is that God will be faithful to deliver you, if you will be faithful to believe Him. It might not come in the manner or time you are expecting, but faith and patience birth the blessings: *“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Hebrews 6:12).

Through the experience I learned some things:

1. GOD IS NOT MOVED BY YOUR

FEELINGS BUT BY YOUR FAITH.

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Christ is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, but He responds to our prayers of faith. He is moved by compassion when we are suffering or in need, because He also suffered in the flesh. Yet, with every miracle of the New Testament, it was faith that released the power of God to minister to those in need.

2. GOD IS NOT MOVED BY YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES BUT BY HIS WORD.

“Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:12).

We often believe that God must come on the scene and help us because the circumstances are killing us. But God is obligated only to His Covenant (His Word), and He is attracted to anyone who knows, quotes and believes the words of the Covenant!

3. GOD WILL DELIVER YOU FROM THE ATTACK IF YOU WILL REMAIN STEADFAST.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be

tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In 2 Timothy 4:17-18, the apostle Paul spoke of being delivered from the mouth of the lion: “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

God might make a way of escape by bringing a person into your life who can assist you. God can also change the situation abruptly, thus bringing you out of your difficulty. Angels can assist in your deliverance. Many examples can be given of how God will make a way where there is no way.

This experience and others that would follow gave me valuable understanding of how the adversary operates. This experience would become a teaching tool that I would share across the nation, in order to help believers through their own supernatural conflicts.

YOU DETERMINE WHO SHOWS UP

Now that I have shared this narrative with you, I am going to reveal a side of this story that I had overlooked, until many years later, when I discussed this incident with the very minister who had given me an important word that still remains part of my spiritual arsenal.

Prior to this six-month attack by evil spirits, my mother was a secretary at the Church of God state headquarters in Roanoke, Virginia. She worked with two noted and anointed men of God—Bishop M.H. Kennedy and Reverend Floyd Lawhon. At the time, Kennedy was the Bishop overseeing the churches in Virginia, and Lawhon was the state Director of Evangelism. He oversaw the state evangelists, of which I was one.

My mother and father often traveled to my revivals in the area and heard the messages I was preaching. Over several weeks, my mother began to notice a common thread with the books I was studying and the messages I was preaching. In her words, I had become overly interested in the subject of demons and evil spirits. Out of concern, she asked Floyd Lawhon if he would speak to me and give me some advice on the matter, since I was encountering odd spiritual warfare at home.

After returning from a revival, I headed to the State Office on the campground in Roanoke to visit Rev. Lawhon. Instead of the cordial, “How was the meeting?” kind of greeting, he firmly said, “I need to talk to you.” I knew that any time one of these men got right to the point and shut the office door behind them, I was about to get a personal and important rebuke, warning, or instruction. I sat across from his desk and he began. “Perry, the Lord has His hand upon you, but you’re spending too much time studying about the devil and demons, and not enough time studying about Jesus and His delivering power. Son, if you think about, read about, and talk about demons, they will show up. But if you read about, talk about, and brag about Jesus, then Jesus will show up.”

There is an important principle in that statement. At times

there is too much emphasis on the devil, while at other times, there is no emphasis on him at all, which leaves battle-worn Believers wounded for lack of knowledge. However, in my case, every other sermon I preached was about the devil or demons. When I turned my attention from the demonic realm to words about faith, Christ's power, the Covenant, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and prophecy, I found that the freedom of the Holy Spirit was released in the services and the spiritual results were astounding. That was a simple but dynamic lesson for a young minister to learn.

After the Holy Spirit visited me early that morning on January 1, 1979, I never again experienced the voices, buzzing noises, the feeling of being paralyzed, or the manifestation of being physically attacked by dark beings. However, since that time, I have felt a presence, perhaps in a hotel room, that would shake the bed or move the covers. When this occurs, I simply speak aloud and say, "I'm going back to sleep, and you will not disturb me in Jesus's name." They can shake whatever they want; I no longer have any sense of fear or dread when this occurs, because I know who I am in Christ and I understand the spiritual authority that I have as a Believer who is in covenant with God. In Luke 10:19 Christ said:

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

In the natural, power is released through a person's physical strength or mental capabilities. However, spiritual authority is released through your words and by quoting the Word of God. When Christ taught, He *"taught them as one having authority,*

and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). Jesus cast evil spirits from people, and observers said, “What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him” (Mark 1:27).

The same spiritual authority that Christ demonstrated in His earthly ministry is available to the righteous Believer today. If you remain silent and accept the mental and physical assaults of the enemy, you will continue in your conflict. You must speak out, using the Scriptures as your sword to cut through the cords of bondage and fear.

CHAPTER 3

SPIRITS ON ASSIGNMENT

“Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.”

– 1 THESSALONIANS 2:18

AFTER THE LORD delivered me from those aggressive attacks of the enemy, I began to develop knowledge about important weapons of warfare that are effective in dealing with the strategies of the enemy. Within three years I encountered yet another level of warfare. Once again, this was an attack that would give me much insight into the operation of our adversary. This allowed me, through personal experience, to gain understanding that would eventually assist thousands of God’s people.

THE FIVE-WEEK REVIVAL

From 1980 through 1996, our church-hosted revivals averaged three weeks in length, with services conducted every night. Occasionally some revivals continued from five to eleven

weeks. In 1981, during a five-week revival, I encountered a hindering spirit that would attempt to damage my ministry for years to come.

In the early 1980s, the small Virginia community where I was preaching was still in the grips of a recession and most local factories had experienced layoffs. This type of condition made a community ripe for a revival. Our meeting, originally scheduled for one week, was extended for thirty-five consecutive services. Extraordinary miracles were occurring during the revival. One woman, Mrs. Thacker, received a miraculous healing of her optic nerve that had been severed by laser surgery. Drug dealers were being saved and people were being delivered from addictions. In five weeks, over one-hundred-fifty souls were converted to Christ, and the same number baptized with the Holy Spirit.

News carried, and the excitement of a move of God was spreading throughout several counties. The crowds were so large that the 850-seat sanctuary was overflowing with people and additional chairs were brought in to accommodate the attendance. On Sunday nights, the police were called to direct the traffic.

The church had prepared a small apartment near the pastor's office in the back of the church to house their evangelists and guest speakers. I stayed in this apartment during the entire revival. Perhaps it seems spiritual to sleep in the back of a church; but when services conclude, the atmosphere can be far different than it is when people are worshipping.

A HINDERING SPIRIT

About the second week of the revival, at approximately three o'clock in the morning, I was awakened by the sound of someone shaking an outside door of the sanctuary, which was located about fifty feet from the apartment. I heard the door open and slam shut. I listened as moments later the door to the janitor's closet, located a few feet down the hall, was opened and slammed shut. By this time I was wondering who had entered the church. The thought occurred to me, "The janitor has selected a strange time to clean the church!"

Within moments, the knob to the door of the evangelist's apartment was turning. There I was, lying in bed, and somebody was entering the apartment without knocking. By this time I was getting annoyed and a little frightened. I couldn't call anybody because there was no phone in the apartment.

The door opened and I thought, "Perhaps the pastor is coming in to inform me that something has happened to a family member." The light from the bathroom across the hall gave me enough visibility to identify the unexpected visitor.

To my shock, when the door opened, I saw a creature in the form of a hunched-back man walk past me. The face was wrapped in old gray cloths, similar to that of an Egyptian mummy. Ragged bib overalls hung loosely around the four-foot creature's frame. This demonic spirit was dragging into the apartment two bags that appeared to be filled with garbage.

As it passed me and walked toward the small kitchen, I pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. I was fully awake. Were my spiritual eyes being opened? Was this a vision? Whatever the explanation, I was seeing this demonic spirit and I knew it was real.

Within less than one minute, this wretched spirit walked back through the apartment, looked toward me, and grinned. A chill ran down my spine and I pretended not to see it. Then it exited the apartment through the door.

I lay in the bed with the covers held tightly around me and began praying under my breath. I could hear this spirit through the walls of the apartment as it entered the pastor's office. I heard file cabinets and drawers being opened. Then I heard this spirit walk up the steps into the pastor's council room, which was located above the apartment. Following that, there was silence.

Some who have never tapped into the spirit realm would ridicule and mock such a strange personal account. For those would mock this true event, I always say, may the Almighty God alone become the judge between me and thee.

I had no interest in becoming a spiritual hero by challenging this evil creature. It took a while before I could go back to sleep. In fact, I would have preferred to run out of the apartment and go home with a family in the church. The next morning I awoke, still dazed by the visitation and uncertain of what it meant. I didn't tell anybody because I was afraid that if I did, they would think I had lost my mind.

The revival meeting continued. I was so overtaken by the presence of God in the services that I paid little attention to the warning that God had allowed me to see by showing me this spirit. The Lord was actually opening my eyes to something happening behind the scenes that I was unaware of.

A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE OF THE

LEADERSHIP

A few days following the incident, I noticed an odd change in the attitude of the pastor and several of the church members. Later I learned that several families were upset with the crowds and the new people who were attending the services. A few thought the emotionalism of Believers rejoicing, worshiping and praying was too offensive. Some carnal church members threatened to leave the church permanently if the pastor did not close the revival. From that moment forward, the pastor seemed divided over the continuation of the revival. He began to talk about closing the revival, despite it being the greatest revival in the church's history.

The altar services continued late into the night. Often, twenty to thirty people would remain in prayer in the sanctuary. But suddenly instructions were given that everyone had to be out of the sanctuary and the doors locked by eleven o'clock.

After four and a half weeks, the announcement was made that the revival would close on Wednesday night. I sincerely felt it was not God's will and made the mistake of saying so. On Wednesday night, with the largest crowd yet and people running to the altars and being saved and delivered, the pastor slipped out of the sanctuary and went home. I returned home the following morning.

THE GARBAGE WAS SPREAD

The following Sunday, the pastor ministered to a large crowd, many of whom had been converted, healed, or spiritually renewed during the revival. He addressed the reasons why he

closed the revival, and then made statements directed toward me, a young, twenty-two year old evangelist. Several statements were rather unusual and confusing to the listener.

The message was broadcast in the community over live radio. Immediately the confusion began. Several unsaved men told their wives, "I heard that preacher this morning and he seems jealous of Perry. I'm not letting you go back to a church with a preacher like that."

People in the small community began to talk. Why was the revival closed when it was going so well? The pastor had told me privately that he and his wife had planned a brief vacation during Thanksgiving, and the revival was interfering with his plans. Yet, his wife would later confess to a friend that they both were afraid that I was "too popular with some of the members" and I would move back to the area and organize a church that would affect this church. On the surface, it appeared that the fear factor led to the decision to close the meeting.

Two weeks after the meeting I received a phone call from a friend in this same church. The man on the other end of the line said, "Perry, the State Overseer had a meeting at our church today. They brought up your name from the beginning and indirectly attempted to pin blame on you for creating strife in the church. Several people stood up in your defense and corrected the situation, but since you were not present in the meeting I taped it for you."

When I heard the tape I was shocked. The State Overseer made a judgment error by allowing people to speak their minds, and they certainly did. He permitted people to clap when they agreed or disagreed over something said. People chose sides;

they were either for or against the revival, for or against the pastor, and for or against the evangelist. The meeting got out of hand. This open church meeting did quite a bit of damage to the congregation because people chose sides.

Several weeks later I traveled to Virginia and sat down with the State Overseer who had conducted the meeting. He was unaware that I had a tape of the entire meeting. I attempted to handle things the Biblical way, and requested to meet with the pastor and correct any misunderstandings. I offered to stand before the church and make a public apology if I had been in error in my attitude or comments, as we are told to do in Matthew 18:15-17.

The Bishop said, "Perry, you didn't do anything wrong. Let me handle this. The pastor is not well and wants to pastor in the town where he has a house and retire there. Just let it pass."

I should have operated the Biblical way and gone directly to the pastor. But I followed the Overseer's advice instead.

During the revival the pastor told me that he would not likely get voted back in as pastor in April and was considering pastoring in the town where he owned a house. Indeed, he did move to that town. Yet, when asked why he left the church, my name came up as the reason for division in the church. Some ministers had enough common sense to ask, "How can a young evangelist create such a problem in a church that is fifty years old and do it in just five weeks? Months later others noted that the attendance was the same, and rumors they were hearing didn't match the evidence they were seeing.

It took a while, but I finally realized what I had seen. A

demonic spirit had spread his “garbage” throughout the church!

But the damage was done. Ministers whom I once considered friends would walk the other way when they saw me at church conventions. Some later admitted they thought that, eventually, something would happen to me in order to stop the momentum of the ministry. Some commented, “He’s getting too big too fast and God is just bringing him down.” Ministers repeated unfounded rumors. A lie was circulating that I hit the pastor and publicly stated I was starting a church. Someone else said that I split the church, took half the people, and started my own church. Another minister even said that I had been banned from preaching in the area. All of these rumors were outright lies that were being told as though they were truth.

The mental oppression this time was different. It wasn’t a dread of the spirit world. It was the torment of hearing stories that were lies and having no way to stop them from spreading.

I discovered how quickly gossip spreads in a church denomination. Since other ministers in my family were affiliated with this denomination, and since the Lord had been giving us great revivals in many cities, I thought that someone with influence in the denomination would come to my assistance and at least ask me a few questions. But no person of influence came forward to help stop the hemorrhaging.

Years later I learned that the leading denominational leaders assumed that my ministry would fade away, so they didn’t bother wasting their time trying to resolve the situation. For the first time I considered quitting evangelistic ministry. I had

prayed, fasted, and spent long hours studying to bring the Word. But now I was dealing with both emotional and financial stress, and had thought that it would be best to do something different, including leave the denomination.

The old, ancient-looking spirit had been assigned to attack the revival, the pastor, the church, and me. It came first to the apartment, then to the pastor's office, and finally to the council room. God was attempting to forewarn me but I was twenty-two years old and did not have experience in discerning such tactics of the enemy.

For several years I wondered, "How did this spirit gain such access into the church and into this situation? Both fear and jealousy were in operation and both can open a door to demonic activity. But there had to be something more. A decade later I received an answer to these questions.

AN ASSIGNMENT BY A SATANIST

Ten years later I was conducting a regional revival, not far from where the hindering spirit had set in motion one of the worse conflicts of my ministry. A young man, the son of someone who had been converted to Christ in a revival I conducted, called me from a hospital. He had been injured in a serious accident and asked me to pray for him. We ministered to him and the following day he was present in the church service.

After an evening service I went to a restaurant with this young man, my wife Pam, and our prayer ministry leader Bea Ogle. This young man began to reveal information to us about an incident that occurred ten years earlier. He said, "Ten years ago I was converted in your revival, but when I saw the

attitude of some so-called Christians, I quit attending church and eventually became involved in the occult.” Other information he told me was later confirmed by a detective in the area who questioned me after hearing that this young man had spoken with me.

The young man told us that he had attended a local university and, out of curiosity, he had been lured into the occult on campus. Once inside the group, he heard a story about something that happened when I was in the area conducting the revival years earlier.

He said to us, “Perry, when you were in that long revival, the son of a nationally known satanic priest was working on campus at this university to recruit young people. This man heard of the spiritual results of your meeting and came to the church one night, stood outside in the parking lot, and brought curses upon you and the church. He could not personally curse you, but he commanded a spirit to hinder and bring confusion to the meeting in order to close it down.”

I thought the young man might be fabricating the story until he said, “The satanist directed a certain type of spirit that was about four feet tall and looked like an Egyptian mummy to cause rumors to be spread about you and the revival in order to bring confusion.”

I almost fell off my seat. I had never publicly told anyone in that area the story of the spirit I saw in the apartment.

He continued, “Do you remember during the revival a certain man (a member of the church) coming by to see the pastor during the day?” I confirmed that I did recall seeing this man. He would come to the church in the afternoon, and he and

the pastor would go into the pastor's office and shut the door.

The young man said, "This man sang in the choir, but was having an affair on his wife. He had become involved in the occult and was told that he could have what he wanted (that being the wife of the occult group leader) if he would start rumors and do something to create confusion about the meeting. This church member was meeting with the pastor and telling him lies in order to cause the pastor to shut down the meeting. He was responsible for planting the seeds of confusion. This is why the pastor wanted to close the revival. He thought this man knew something that, in fact, he did not know. It was a set up the whole time."

He continued to reveal other facts and pieces of information that I knew he couldn't possibly have knowledge of from any other sources.

Years later, I returned to the same church where the satanic assignment had unfolded. I publicly apologized for not informing them about the spirit I saw many years before, and I told them the story of what had happened. That night hundreds wept before God as a supernatural healing began.

An unfortunate part of the event was that, when the contention and confusion broke out among certain people, nobody in the church stood up and said, "Wait a minute. This is the enemy attempting to work among us." Instead, it became a battle of flesh and blood, of opinions and personalities. This also shows us that, if the enemy goes undetected and is not exposed, he will gain the advantage by default.

Some will wonder why I didn't share the incident with the church at the time it happened. As I considered doing so, I

thought, “Why say anything? I don’t know what it means and some folks would never believe it.”

That spirit would have been limited in its warfare if people had not allowed themselves to fall prey to gossip, slander and personal opinions. As in the time of King Saul, when Saul became jealous of David, that jealousy opened a door to an evil spirit that sometimes tormented Saul (1 Samuel 16:14; 18:10; 19:9). Saul made twenty-one attempts on David’s life, and became the tool through which this evil entity worked.

Even Believers can yield to the wrong spirits. Peter once rebuked Jesus, telling Him that He would not suffer. Jesus said, “*Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*” (Matthew 16:23). Peter was not Satan, but he was speaking contrary to the divine will of God. Ananias and Sapphira were members in the early church and were told that Satan had filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3).

Our spirit is born again, but our mind must continually be renewed (Ephesians 4:23). Otherwise, our carnal minds could yield to the fiery darts of the enemy, and we could play into the plans of the adversary.

THE ENEMY’S PLANS EVENTUALLY BACKFIRED

This spirit that had been sent to cause confusion had motivated the carnal minds of certain people to slander and criticize our ministry. Those who didn’t investigate the facts accepted the rumors as truth, and our ministry suffered for a

season. During this time a minister, Raymond Culpepper, Jr., met me in a restaurant in Alabama. He said, "Perry, don't dwell on this. Keep on ministering and the Lord will avenge you. It just may be that the Lord has allowed this knowing the great ministry you will have, and like Paul, God has allowed it so you would not become exalted in your eyes."

During this humiliating time, I humbled myself before God. Once I did that, the revivals started again. I began a revival in Daisy, Tennessee that continued for eight weeks, with hundreds converted to Christ and hundreds more baptized in the Holy Spirit. The next revival continued for two weeks in Montgomery, Alabama. Following this revival I married my wife Pam, and two days later began a revival in Gastonia, North Carolina that continued for three weeks. In this revival we met a young man named Jentezen Franklin who was just starting his ministry. Jentezen now pastors Free Chapel Worship Center in Gainesville, Georgia, which is one of America's greatest churches.

The enemy's plan eventually backfired. I came out of the fire a better person and continued to experience God's favor in the revivals. Perhaps it was possible that, as a young man who was having long revivals, large crowds, and record-breaking results in many churches, my heart could have become proud. So it could be that the Lord allowed the hindering spirit to keep me trusting in and dependent on Him.

Over twenty-five years later, I felt impressed to write a five-page letter to the elderly wife of this now-deceased minister, in which I shared with her the detailed information about the demonic attack against the revival and the church. She was unaware of much of the information I shared, and she was not

even aware that the church member who was coming to visit the pastor every day had given false information to her husband.

I confessed my faults to her and asked her to forgive me for anything I had done that might have caused her to become angry at me. She received my words, and before she passed away, she sent a great compliment to me. By following the Biblical pattern, the enemy was defeated and God prevailed. I have since been back many times to that same church, and have witnessed powerful outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

We would be stunned if we only knew the number of churches that have been attacked by such spirits; yet the people think it is a battle with the board members, or the church members, or the pastor. Spirits are generally invisible, and therefore not easily detected. They are crafty and sly in their approach.

One man in the Bible knew what it was like to deal with a strong hindering spirit. It is this example that will give us the determination to press on.

CHAPTER 4

DO YOU HAVE A THORN IN THE FLESH?

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

– 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

THE SCRIPTURES ARE filled with examples of men and women who overcame extreme adversity as they ran the race of

faith. Hebrews chapter 11, often called the hall of faith, lists the names of faithful saints of old whose determination and commitment to God was stronger than all opposition. But no man in scripture understood the struggle of dealing with a hindering spirit better than the Apostle Paul. The spirit assigned to him became a thorn in the flesh.

The Apostle Paul was an excellent choice to lead the first century Gentile church. Born in Italy, in the city of Tarsus, Paul was highly educated and could fluently speak several languages. As a youth he trained under the noted Rabbi Gamaliel. He became an influential Pharisee who, after the birth of the Christian church, became Judaism's most outspoken activist against the new heretical sect of the Nazarenes. Saul, his name before his conversion, prided himself on arresting and persecuting Christians (Acts 9).

His conversion on the road to Damascus created a great controversy. His Jewish colleagues were both baffled and angry, and the Christian leaders were happy, but skeptical. Some assumed the conversion was a trap to gain entrance into the church, where he would compile a list of names for future arrest. Look at the attitude of Ananias, the man sent by the Holy Spirit to pray for Saul after his conversion:

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name."

– ACTS 9:13-14

The conversion of Saul was an astonishing victory for the

church and a great blow to the kingdom of darkness. The man that the adversary used to murder prominent Christians was now leading the people he once persecuted! It seems the very wicked spirits that motivated Paul to persecute the Christians may have turned against Paul himself, after his conversion.

THRUST INTO THE CONFLICT

Within days of his conversion Saul, whom the Lord renamed Paul, was thrust into a conflict. His life was threatened and he barely escaped over the wall of a city in a basket (Acts 9:24-25). From that moment until the conclusion of Paul's ministry, he was abused, beaten, arrested and harassed for the Gospel's sake. The words of the Lord were fulfilled, that Paul would suffer great things for the sake of Christ's name (Acts 9:16).

After several years of ministry, Paul revealed to the church at Corinth that he was being harassed by a messenger of Satan. This messenger had become Paul's thorn in the flesh. Paul wrote:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

– 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

Scholars have promoted various theories to define this thorn in the flesh. Some have taught that Paul had an eye disease and encountered a difficult time writing his epistles in prison. Others teach that he had an unconverted wife who was his

thorn in the flesh. Some have contended that Paul's thorn was his height, or that he was hunched-back.

All of these theories are mere assumptions that attempt to explain Paul's thorn. Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus, but was healed when he was prayed for in Acts 9:17. Perhaps Paul once had a wife, since he was a Pharisee; but years later when he wrote 1 Corinthians 7:8, he was unmarried. He could have been neither hunched-back nor dwarfed, nor even had a blemished eye and have been a Pharisee (Leviticus 21:20).

Those who believe that Paul's thorn was a physical ailment note that he called this messenger a thorn in the flesh. The assumption is that it was a problem that affected his physical body. The only other place in Scripture that alludes to a thorn in the flesh is found in the book of Numbers. When Joshua and Israel possessed the Promised Land, God warned Israel that if they didn't defeat their enemies, they would become thorns:

"But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell."

– NUMBERS 33:55

"Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD

your God hath given you.”

– JOSHUA 23:13

“Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.”

– JUDGES 2:3

The phrase thorn in the flesh is similar to the phrases relating to the surrounding nations that would create confusion and discomfort for the Hebrews when they possessed the land. Paul’s phrase, thorn in the flesh, would be similar to saying, “They are a pain in the neck.” The person making such a statement does not have a sore neck, but it is simply an expression.

Paul was saying that this messenger was a pain in the neck! A careful word study from Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians chapter twelve will help us define this thorn in the flesh.

A DEMONIC MESSENGER

Paul said there was a “messenger of Satan.” The Greek word used here is angelos, and it is found over 180 times in the New Testament. In most cases the word is translated as angel, and about seven times it is translated as messenger. It is the same Greek word used in Revelation chapters two and three, where Christ addressed the pastors of the seven churches and said, “Unto the angel of the church at Sardis,” and so forth (Revelation 2:1; 2:8; 2:12; 2:18). In these passages, the angel was a human messenger.

Paul's messenger was an angel of Satan. According to Scripture, Satan has an organized kingdom consisting of principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). This messenger was assigned from Satan to attack Paul, or to buffet him.

The word buffet is a Greek word meaning "to keep slapping or to deal blow after blow." Picture a man and his opponent in a boxing ring. The opposition is continually clipping him with a blow strong enough to knock him off balance. Paul was saying, when I think I am standing up and doing well, I am suddenly knocked down again. I pick myself up and think that I am making progress, and suddenly I am hit again.

In 2 Corinthians chapter eleven, prior to Paul revealing this thorn in the flesh, he listed a series of obstacles he consistently encountered that slowed down his ministry and caused him great pain, both physically and emotionally:

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

"Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

"In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of

robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

“In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

“Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”

– 2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-28

The list includes twenty-two different trials and difficulties that Paul encountered during his ministry. No other apostle in the New Testament had a list like this. The book of Acts gives the references to many of the attacks and hindrances that he experienced:

- His life was threatened and he escaped over the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25).
- Paul’s message was rejected by the Jews and he was accused of blasphemy (Acts 13:45).
- Paul was dragged outside the city of Lystria and stoned (Acts 14:19).
- A strong contention arose between Paul and Barnabas that caused a division (Acts 15:39).
- Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten and thrown in prison (Acts 16:22-24).

- Paul's preaching caused an uproar at Thessalonica (Acts 17:13-14).
- Paul's message was rejected at Corinth. He was arrested and stood trial (Acts 18:12).
- A riot broke out at Ephesus after idol worshipers were converted to Christ (Acts 19:29).
- A riot broke out in the city and Paul was arrested (Acts 21:30).
- Paul had to go to court for preaching the Gospel (Acts 22).
- A group of zealous religious Jews sought to kill Paul (Acts 23:12).
- While on his way to Rome, Paul was involved in a severe shipwreck (Acts 27:9-26).
- Paul was bitten by a deadly viper, yet miraculously survived (Acts 28:3-6).

A strong demonic spirit was assigned to Paul to create adverse circumstances against his ministry. We are also told why the Lord permitted this entity to work against Paul. The apostle wrote:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

- 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

Paul received an abundance of revelations. Scholars note that

this powerful apostle of faith records in the Bible seven major revelations that were given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. Shortly after Paul's conversion, he departed Damascus under a death threat and went into the desert of Arabia (possibly Mount Sinai) and received the revelations that he recorded in his thirteen epistles of the New Testament (Galatians 1:17; 4:25). Paul received the revelation of the catching away, also known as the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18); the mystery of the resurrection (1 Corinthians chapter 15); and the mystery of how the Gentiles were grafted into the Covenant (Romans chapter 11).

Being a mere mortal, it would have been easy for Paul to become lifted up in pride. After all, who else in the Bible wrote thirteen books? Who else received the New Testament revelations that Paul received? It was the abundance of the revelations that the enemy hated. Satan hates for any person to have the eyes of their understanding opened through the revelation of God's Word. The revelation can change your situation.

When God announced at the Jordan River that Jesus was His Son, immediately Satan tempted Jesus for forty days and challenged His position as the Son of God (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 4:3). Peter received a revelation and confessed that Jesus was the Son of God; and when he did, Peter became a target of Satan (Matthew 16:16; Luke 22:31).

Do you recall when you heard a message that revealed how God could change your life? What about a revelation of God's healing power, or the infilling of the Holy Spirit? Remember when you first felt the presence of God and how His presence impacted your life? The adversary recognizes the power of the

revelation. Once our understanding is enlightened, we are no longer a pushover for the kingdom of darkness. Instead of being threatened by the enemy, we become a threat to the enemy!

Paul understood this fact, and he knew that battling this spirit kept him before God's presence continually. It is difficult for a person to be lifted up in pride when they are continually being harassed and having their very life threatened. This messenger of Satan used people as his voice and his weapon to distract, detour, and hinder the ministry of Paul.

EVIL SPIRITS WORK THROUGH PEOPLE

From Acts chapter nine through Acts chapter twenty-eight, we read where Paul was arrested, beaten and severely persecuted. In each instance, people caused the insurrections against him. Evil spirits work through people. Without the voice, hands, and feet of a human being, an evil spirit is limited in what it can accomplish. Satan has always used people to oppose the work of the Gospel. My greatest opposition in ministry has come from the words and actions of people. These include, but are not limited to:

- Breakdown in communication that led to misunderstandings;
- Rumors birthed through half-truths and lies being repeated as facts;
- People influencing others not to attend revivals or be involved in our ministry;

- Circumstances rising up that cannot be controlled or dealt with in the natural.

Countless times, a report has surfaced claiming that I allegedly said something in a message that was never said. In the early 1980s I preached on the “ashes of the red heifer.” This was a prophecy message that revealed how the religious Jews would need the ashes of a red heifer (see Numbers chapter nineteen) to purify the future Temple. The breeding of the red heifer had been in the news in Israel and, at that time, I was only one of two people speaking on the subject in the United States.

On one occasion I was ministering in a large church and the pastor was unable to be present in the service. A few weeks later I learned that he had informed several pastor friends that I was preaching heresy, and he alleged that I had said in his church that Jesus could not return until a red heifer was burnt in Israel. I knew this was not a true statement because I did not believe that. I listened to a tape of the service, and nothing of that kind was said. Yet, because of this man’s influence, several ministers stopped contacting me for revivals. It was a pity they never spoke with me personally to see what I said or what I believed, before they judged me by another man’s incorrect statement.

The hindering spirit that buffeted Paul made matters difficult for him as he ministered from city to city. His sermons often led to riots and his public appearances often landed him in jail. This spirit motivated the ungodly and the religious crowds to rise up against Paul. Satan’s kingdom was being damaged by Paul’s ministry. Since Satan could not stop Paul, he attempted to hinder him or slow him down, thus affecting the momentum

of the ministry.

Although the hindering spirit motivated people to attack and persecute Paul, thereby causing him physical distress, Paul knew that God was still in control and the plan of God would move on schedule. Persecution is designed to make you run away from the Word (Matthew 13:21). Strong believers will run to the Word and not from the Word in times of attack.

THE CHURCH IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

My dad, Fred Stone, was a man who was very sensitive to the Holy Spirit and spent extended time in prayer and fasting. Occasionally, the Holy Spirit would open up his eyes to the spirit realm. Those who knew him best saw him as a humble, pure-hearted man of faith whom God used in marvelous ways through over fifty years of ministry.

During the early 1970s, we lived in Arlington, Virginia where Dad pastored the Church of God at Bailey's Crossroads. Dad assumed the pastorate with about fifteen people, and began to see growth almost immediately.

After a few years of pastoring, Dad encountered a strange spiritual opposition in the church. It was difficult to explain, but it could be felt in the services. Dad went into a time of prayer and fasting, and asked God to remove this invisible barricade that seemed to veil the atmosphere like a heavy blanket.

One evening, while alone in deep prayer at the church, Dad was seeking God for His divine intervention. Suddenly he heard a noise, and as he turned to look, he noticed something in the right hand corner of the church. Near the front of the

sanctuary, he saw a large angelic being with a sword drawn in it hands, extending it over the sanctuary. A great fear of the Lord came over Dad, and he knew God was going to bring deliverance.

The following Sunday as Dad ministered, he asked the congregation to stand and begin to bind the hindrances of the enemy. I was sitting on the second row and vividly remember what followed. In the midst of the prayer, there was a noise that sounded like a huge bird flapping its wings. It was so real that men on the front row opened their eyes and looked around. This flapping noise continued for a moment and then began to fade as it seemed to ascend out of the sanctuary through the roof. Suddenly, the glory of the Lord began to fall on the congregation. It was as though a mighty whirlwind blew into the building.

Dad believed the angel of the Lord brought a breakthrough by literally removing some form of spiritual opposition. The Biblical precedent for this is in Daniel chapter ten. The answer to Daniel's prayer was being hindered in the upper atmosphere by an evil spirit called the prince of Persia. This principality spirit was eventually restrained by the power of an archangel named Michael. This warring angel bound the power of this satanic prince and released the angel of God to bring Daniel a much-needed revelation from heaven.

Here we have a picture of the conflict. The Kingdom of God, marshaled by a host of angels, is waging war for the souls of mankind against a dark kingdom, whose spirits are assigned to stop all progress of the Gospel using every weapon at their disposal. Having personally experienced the influence of a hindering spirit, I know that they first bring fear. Secondly, they

bring confusion. And then they bring persecution. It is persecution for the Word of God's sake; it is persecution for preaching truth that others won't touch for fear of being labeled controversial.

THE ENEMY PLAYS INTO GOD'S PLANS

In the early church, Satan created great persecution to hinder the Gospel. Instead of hindering the message, the messengers were "scattered abroad" as the Gospel of Christ spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and finally to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). This scattering enabled the messengers to carry the Gospel to the remote places of the world. Acts 17:6 says they turned the world upside down. The plot of the enemy backfired.

The scripture speaks of a couple in the early church named Aquila and Priscilla. Great persecution in Rome caused them to depart the city and go to Israel (Acts 18:1-2). During their stay they met a highly educated man named Apollos. This precious couple took Apollos into their home and taught him the way of truth more perfectly (Acts 18:26). Later, Apollos became one of the three most popular ministers in the early church (1 Corinthians 1:12).

These instances illustrate how God can turn the table on the plans of the enemy. When Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and sold him to a band of Ishmaelites, they were unaware of a greater purpose God had for Joseph. Seventeen years later, the sons of Jacob stood in Egypt purchasing food from none other than Joseph, whom they did not recognize (Genesis 42:3-8). His eleven brothers were fearful that Joseph would either kill

them for their previous actions against him, or make them slaves. Joseph told them, *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Genesis 50:20).

Your thorn in the flesh might not be an actual spirit assigned from Satan, but it might be critical people who agitate you by mocking your faith at school or at work. Your thorn might be a habit or an addiction you are battling that has seemed to latch itself to you. Thorns come in the form of cares of life that choke the Word, thereby making your efforts unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). A thorn, in the natural, pricks the skin and creates discomfort. But these thorns that affect your spiritual walk should never defeat you; instead, they should motivate you to move closer to the Lord for His help.

Whatever your thorn might be, your reaction to persecution, opposition and spiritual attacks will help determine the final outcome of the conflicts. At times God allows the trouble to keep us completely dependent upon Him. I have personally lived out this fact for many years. I was first made aware of the journey I would take, shortly after my wife and I were married.

CHAPTER 5

WHEN GOD ALLOWS A HINDERING SPIRIT

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

– 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

PAM AND I were married Friday, April 2, 1982 in Northport, Alabama. Two days later we began a three-week revival in Gastonia, North Carolina at the Linwood Church of God. Before introducing me each night, the pastor would embarrass us by saying, “This is a honeymoon revival!”

During the first week of that meeting, I experienced a dream one night that has remained true to this day. The dream revealed the hindrances that would come against our ministry and, most of all, the reason they would be permitted.

In Job 33:15-16 we read, *“In a dream, in a vision of the*

night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction..." God will sometimes use dreams to give us instruction.

While in a deep sleep, I dreamed that I was carried into a large, square-shaped room with four doors. I was told that I could choose to walk through any one of the four doors. As I approached the doors, they would open before me and I caught a brief glimpse of what lay behind them.

Behind the first door were a large number of college students. They seemed to be distracted from their studies and were caught up in a party atmosphere. I knew this door represented a Christian college I could attend; but for some reason, I was compelled not to walk through the door.

I then moved toward the second door. Here I saw ministers dressed in black suits. They were good moral and spiritual men, and they were standing around in small circles. I knew several of them to be executive leaders in the denomination I was associated with. I knew this door represented denominational politics. If I chose this door, certain key officials would help push me up the denominational ladder. The eyes of my understanding were opened to realize that, if I depended upon man, I would displease God. If I depended upon God, I would do His will. I closed this door.

To this day I cannot recall what was behind the third door, but I remember closing it almost immediately. There was only one door that remained. I certainly did not expect to see what lay behind this mysterious door.

As I walked to the fourth and final door, a large signed

marked persecution hung boldly over the entrance. I thought, “I certainly don’t want this door, but it is the only one left to walk through.” The moment I stepped across the threshold, I ascended a set of stairs. I saw a skyline of a major city with the buildings silhouetted in the background. Rising from the silhouette was a large being dressed in black. It suddenly lunged with great speed toward me, with a large sword in its right hand.

I felt helpless and defenseless, having no weapon in my hand. A sword was handed to me and a voice instructed, “Take this sword and cut off the hand of the enemy.” With one swipe of the silver sword, I severed one hand from this creature, and its hand and its sword fell to the ground.

Immediately, after defeating the first enemy, another wicked creature lurched from out of the darkness. He, too, was armed. I maintained my ground and swung the silver sword with such force that the dark figure retreated. After each victory there was another battle. With every battle there was a victory by using the sword.

TIRED OF THE CONFLICT

I recall becoming weary during the fighting. I knew this was why the word “persecution” was carved on the door. I also know that the Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). The only weapon that would defeat the persecution and harassment would be the Scriptures. As the feeling of weariness came over me, a precious yet strong voice behind me said, *“Blessed is he who is skilled with the sword. It will keep him from falling.”*

Then I understood the purpose of the fourth door. The sword represents the Word of God, and the Word is sharper, quicker, and more powerful than any two-edged sword. The only way of standing in the conflicts would be to have knowledge of the Word and skill in using the Word. I would have to be rooted and grounded in what I knew to be truth. By selecting persecution, it causes one to maintain a humble spirit before the Lord. It keeps one continually dependent upon God's power and not upon our own ability.

This was the lesson I learned by reading the words of Paul. A messenger of Satan buffeted him. Paul was hindered but not defeated:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

– 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9

Often people look at where a minister or ministry is at the moment, without ever knowing the price that has been paid to birth and grow that ministry. Only those within the closest inner circle are fully aware of the long hours, weariness, fasting, personal financial sacrifices, long hours of traveling and yes, persecution for the Word's sake, that a ministry must endure to be rewarded for faithfulness.

From my perspective, I have often said that it must be great to work from nine to five and then go home, have Saturday and Sunday free to spend all day with your family, and then sit in church on the Sabbath and receive ministry. It must be wonderful to seldom stay in a hotel where the mattress gives

you a backache for a week, and where you have to drag around luggage and spend hours in airports dealing with security and delays.

Traveling, flying, staying in hotels, and preaching every weekend are part of the price an evangelist pays to work in the harvest field. Persecution also comes with the territory. Persecution from without (by the world) is expected and understandable; but persecution from within (by the church) is not an easy adjustment.

Yet, persecution brings greater dependency upon the Holy Spirit. The length and power of the sword is dependent upon the amount of Word you have hidden in your spirit. We overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11). Your testimony is the praise report that you have, once you have passed the test.

In the Apostle Paul's day, persecution consisted of religious Jews running him out of the synagogues and accusing him of preaching heresy. His area-wide evangelistic campaigns often led to his arrest and a weekend stay in a one-star Roman prison, equipped with the latest chains and fetters, and a personal prison guard who took pleasure in watching a prisoner get the beating of his life.

On one occasion Paul was dragged to the edge of the city and stoned by an angry mob (Acts 14:19). He boarded a ship and a storm tore the boat into pieces (Acts 27:38-44). Once while collecting firewood, a poisonous serpent bit him on the hand. Paul simply shook it off and the snake roasted to ashes in the fire (Acts 28:3-5). Paul was able to overcome every area of opposition, persecution, and hindrance. The spirit assigned

to Paul could wear him down but couldn't wear him out.

Sometimes nationally-known ministers must deal with opposition from the press or other forms of secular media, or even a former employee who has a personal vendetta. These jabs, innuendoes, and verbal accusations are one-sided swords in the hands of enemies who are attempting to wound the minister's integrity. And everybody knows that a reputation of integrity is important to a person involved in ministry.

Consider the ministry of Jesus. He was accused of false miracles and of casting out demons by the power of a demon (Matthew 12:24). The self-righteous religious Pharisees attempted to disrupt the flow of His ministry by sitting on the front row of the synagogue and questioning His motives or criticizing His doctrine. On one occasion Jesus preached a message about His blood and His body. The entire church walked out on Him, with the exception of His disciples (John 6:50-66).

Those disciples who were full of the Word of God had heard the words of life and were transformed. They remained steadfast with Christ, while the shallow ones fell away and followed Him no more. One message they didn't understand offended them!

ASKING GOD FOR RELIEF

After Paul expounded upon the twenty-two types of assaults and hindrances he encountered, and then explained that a messenger of Satan was given to him, he also revealed that a certain prayer he prayed was not answered in the manner he expected. He had asked God to remove this messenger of Satan

from his life: *“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me”* (2 Corinthians 12:8).

Certainly a man who received revelation directly from God and was caught up into the third heaven could get this simple prayer answered. Paul could pray a prayer to raise the dead, heal the sick, and drive evil spirits from those who were possessed. This was the man of whom demons said, “Jesus I know and Paul I know” (Acts 19:15). Yet, after three times of asking God to remove this thorn, the Lord answered Paul:

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

– 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

The word grace speaks of the unmerited favor of God. The Lord revealed to Paul that His favor would be part of his life, despite the demonic spirit that was working against him.

Throughout Paul’s ministry, the Lord helped him and gave him a way of escape. At times, the trouble concluded in a citywide revival that turned the community to Christ (Acts 16). On another occasion, the enemy’s attack led to the conversion of a jailor and his family (Acts 16:31). This represented the grace of God that was sufficient.

THE GRACE FACTOR IN YOUR LIFE

The grace factor will be revealed in three areas of your life: grace for the race; grace for the place; and grace for the case.

Grace for the race is grace for your mission. Grace for the place is grace for your position. Grace for the case is grace for your condition. The grace of God enables you to go places others cannot, do things others will not, and experience things others have not.

I know of missionaries who travel to rough territory, driving ten hours one way and making their own roads as they go. They have no quality accommodations for a good night's rest. The water is bacteria-laden and the food has the potential to cause deadly food poisoning. Yet, joyfully they travel the world, often flying on unsafe planes to take the Gospel to the unreached.

How do they do it? They have grace for the race. Everyone can run the race, but not to the same place. Everyone can run the race, but not at the same pace. Everyone who runs the race can have a special level of grace. These same missionaries used to tell me, "Perry, there is no way we could keep your schedule and do what you are doing." I tell them, "You are called to travel those places that I could never go. I am just burdened; so I will support you as you go."

God also gives you grace for the place. I am not a pastor; I am an evangelist-teacher. Many of my pastor friends have told me they once attempted to evangelize and it was a terrible experience. Yet, I still enjoy traveling and preaching in different places and to new faces. If I had to pastor a church and preach there every week, I think I would become restless. Yet, a pastor who is called to that position enjoys watching your children grow, marrying and burying your loved ones, and shepherding the congregation throughout the year. Everybody has grace for the position to which God has called them.

There is grace for the condition in which you find yourself. This is grace for the case. You will never know how much you can handle until you are forced into a situation where you must deal with adversity. The Bible says that he will not allow us to suffer above that which we are able, but will make a way of escape that we may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). God does not always deliver us before trouble begins. At times He delivers us in the midst of the fire, as He did with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (Daniel 3:13-26).

When we need more grace, God is able to extend more favor and grace to us in the form of long-suffering and mercy. James 4:6 tells us, *“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”*

Despite the physical, emotional and verbal abuse that overwhelmed Paul’s ministry, he wrote these encouraging words in 2 Timothy 4:17: *“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me...”*

THE THORN WAS REMOVED

I once thought it was unfair for this chosen servant of God to struggle throughout his entire ministry with this thorn in the flesh. He was hindered at every turn, misunderstood when he preached, and either had a revival or a riot in nearly every city where he ministered. Then while studying the book of Acts, I noticed that it concluded with Paul in Rome, Italy. A unique statement is made relating to Paul’s ministry in Rome:

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

– ACTS 28:30-31

For two years Paul enjoyed living in a house with servants and received visitors without restraint. A version of this passage directly from the Greek reads: *"Speaking...about the Lord Jesus Christ with all outspokenness unhinderedly."*

According to this verse, Paul spent two years speaking and teaching with boldness and was unhindered in the process. Paul was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5); yet, much of his persecution and resistance came from other Jews in the region of Asia. Once Paul, who was a Roman citizen, entered Rome, he was not severely persecuted because Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. Rome seldom persecuted its own citizens. God allowed Paul to experience relief for two years from this hindering spirit.

SEASONS OF RELIEF

The Bible speaks of times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord: *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

Because of God's grace, He allows seasons of refreshing and relief in our lives. He will not allow nonstop battles to hit us without experiencing times of great miracles and answers to prayer. According to *W.E. Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, one of the meanings of the word refresh is

“to give intermission from labor.” The word in Acts 3:19 means, “to obtain relief.” In 2 Timothy 1:16, the word means “to make cool.” Just when you are feeling the heat in the fiery furnace, the Lord makes things cool! At the time you can’t take any more of the labor pains, the Lord gives an intermission from the labor.

Despite many times of opposition, the Lord’s grace has been sufficient to bring us through trying times in our own ministry and continue to bring spiritual results. True Gospel ministry is not a party, but a battle for souls. We cannot expect smooth sailing on the ship of our destiny; indeed, we will encounter contrary winds that are designed to fill the boat with water and sink the ship. Yet, the One who is the storm calmer, Jesus Christ, will arise in times of desperation and speak these words, “*Peace, be still*” (Mark 4:39).

When my wife gave birth to our son and daughter, I was in the birthing room both times. I saw Pam grip the rail of the bed, grunt in pain, and breathe a certain way to help relieve the labor pains. After the birth of our son I asked her, “How did you endure the intense pain of labor?” She replied, “I didn’t concentrate on the pain. I concentrated on the fact that a brief time of relief would follow.”

When the enemy is on the warpath, we often spend too much time concentrating on the enemy. Our conversation with others is filled with statements such as, “The enemy is really working overtime...I’m getting tired of all these attacks of the devil....It seems like I go from one battle to another.”

Our concentration should be on the grace of God to get us through the battle! Look at what the enemy is *not* able to do:

1. He cannot bring a major attack without the permission of the Lord (Job 1:12).
2. He can plan the attack, but cannot determine the final outcome (Job 42:10).
3. He is limited in the level of attack that he can bring (Job 2:6).

During the times of my greatest spiritual battles, it was a comfort to know that God knew about this conflict long before it ever manifested. If He knew about the conflict before it unfolded, then He has planned the day and time when I will encounter the victory. It is my job to remain faithful to the Word and not back down from the truth.

GROWING PAINS

As children grow from childhood to adulthood, they experience growing pains. As the physical growth spurt hits, they find that their movements become a little awkward and their voice begins to change. They feel emotions that are new to them. For those who have long since gone through those changes, we sometimes pay little attention to the adjustments and the emotional roller coaster the child is experiencing.

The Believer also experiences growing pains. After salvation, some need deliverance from problems such as tempers, unclean habits, or emotional ties with past friends. Deep inside they feel pain as their flesh begins to war against their spirit. When we have been converted for many years, we often forget what it feels like to suddenly separate from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Often when a convert gains a victory, there will be another hurdle to jump or another mountain to climb. We must all understand that there are various levels of spiritual growth and various levels of spiritual attack that we will encounter as we run this race. I call these, *new levels, new devils*.

CHAPTER 6

NEW LEVELS NEW DEVILS

*“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,
but against principalities, against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

– EPHESIANS 6:12

MANY YEARS AGO a noted television minister announced that the doors were opening for his telecast to be aired on a government channel in one of the largest communist nations on earth. This was exciting news. I recall telling my wife Pam, “I hope this man has a strong prayer base of intercessors as he begins to send the Gospel into that nation. That country has a stronghold of the dragon (Satan) himself, and the enemy will set out to attack him.”

This man was entering an arena of spiritual warfare that he had never before fought, and he would face spiritual principalities that he had never previously engaged in battle. Indeed, within a few months, he was in the struggle of his life, and his ministry was caught in the middle of conflict. When

you move into a battle you have never before experienced, you might need weapons that you have never before used—including an increased prayer covering.

Each new position brings transition. Every level of progression in Christ introduces a different level of conflict. Often, military personnel will move up through the ranks from a lower position to one of great authority. Years of faithful service and victories in battle create the open door of promotion. Each promotion brings with it added responsibility. Years ago I heard Pastor Tony Scott say, “Perry, with every new level, you will encounter a new devil.” That does not mean new in age, but new in your personal conflict.

These new attacks by spirits you have never before encountered will attempt to challenge your new dimension in Christ. Just as all military personnel are not of equal rank, neither are all spirits of equal levels of authority. Ephesians 6:12 classifies the spirit rebels of the kingdom of darkness as *principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in heavenly places*.

Lesser spirits can be easily dealt with by casting them out. Stronger prince spirits, such as the ones Daniel encountered as recorded in Daniel chapter 10, have more authority to control a nation. These are dealt with directly by angels of the Lord.

Throughout the years, ministries have sometimes challenged these very strong prince spirits in Satan’s realm, only to experience a severe, almost destructive attack on their personal life or ministry. Some Christians boldly rail against the stronger satanic prince spirits, yet the Bible makes it clear not to do so. When Michael, the archangel, was wrestling with

Satan over the body of Moses, the Bible says in Jude 9, “*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.*”

Even Michael, who has personally fought the stronger spirits (Daniel 10:13), would not verbally rail against Satan. This could be because both Michael and Satan are angels and are of the same rank in the spirit realm. Therefore, Michael rebuked Satan in the name of the Lord and not by his own authority. Another example is when Satan stood to resist the building of the Temple in Zechariah 3:1-3. The angel of the Lord came and said, “*The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.*”

While we are given authority over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19), and have authority to cast out spirits in the name of Jesus (Mark 16:17), we must neither misuse nor abuse spiritual authority. There are some ranks of spirits that will not even depart from a sick person unless the Believer has spent time praying and fasting, to remove any unbelief before the act of deliverance (Matthew 17:20).

If we must pray and fast in order to believe and exercise true spiritual authority, imagine the amount of prayer and fasting required to break the strongholds over an entire nation. In Revelation chapter 12, Satan initiates a battle in the heavens. The conflict involves Michael and his angels warring against Satan and his angels. The authority given Michael enables him and his angelic army to thrust Satan and his angels out of their position of authority in the heavens. Satan then takes up headquarters on the earth (Revelation 12:12).

In the Bible, angels always dealt with the highest ranking

prince spirits in Satan's kingdom. I have known of ministries that would begin to publicly challenge the prince spirit over their city and, within weeks, divorce, sickness, and terrible crisis were falling over the church like a blanket. Not enough fasting and prayer went before their challenge.

Spiritual maturity must accompany spiritual authority. Think about the many intercessors that will head to a major city and spend hours demanding and commanding that the prince over the city come down. Yet back home, their family members are unsaved and personal conflicts are seldom resolved. What good does it do you to engage in a battle over the nation when the battle at home is destroying your family? This is why Paul wrote that spiritual leaders must be able to direct their personal matters in order to be effective in the house of God (1 Timothy 3:5).

In dealing with the stronger spirits, we need experience gained from former battles. The military does not thrust a novice on the front lines of battle, and neither should the Believer expect sudden results and great victories if they are lacking wisdom and experience.

The seven sons of Sceva attempted to cast out demonic spirits without true authority. They commanded the spirits to come out in "the name of Jesus whom Paul preached." The demon-possessed man tore their clothes off and the rookie exorcist team ran through the street naked (Acts 19:14-16). These seven men were wounded by their attempt to tackle something far bigger than they were prepared to handle. They assumed that their authority was in the words they were saying, when true authority comes out of a pure relationship with Jesus Christ.

A WARNING IN ROMANIA

After the fall of communism, I traveled with other friends to minister in Romania. The nation, once tied in the throes of an atheistic and communist government, was now enjoying freedom to hear the Gospel. After service one evening, an elderly woman came to me and began to share a vision the Lord had given her while I was preaching. For decades, the Christians in those nations had to depend upon prayer and the revelations of the Holy Spirit to survive, so I knew this woman heard from the Lord.

The woman took my hand and said (through my translator), “Tonight I want to warn you. Your preaching has shaken the strongholds of a number of spirits in America. The lesser spirits cannot deal with you and have gone to a much stronger spirit seeking assistance to stop you. This spirit has set out to destroy you. You must be on guard.”

That’s not the type of word anyone wants to hear. You come away thinking, “Oh no, now what am I going to have to deal with?”

Two nights later in another city miles away, another godly woman came to me following the service with the same revelation. She said “This strong spirit is going to try to dirty your hands in order to shut your mouth.” I knew without a doubt that the Lord was sending me a warning from halfway around the world.

In the last city where I ministered, a third woman came to me with an almost identical warning. (These women were from three different cities and did not know one another.) This

woman said, “While in deep prayer, I overheard the conversation of a strong principality spirit as he laid out a strategy against you.”

I remembered the verse, “*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*” (Matthew 18:16). I said nothing about these three warnings, but hid them in my heart.

THE PROPHECY FROM THE DEVIL

A short time later, after I had returned home from overseas, I received a phone call from a former minister who had experienced an attack from the enemy that had caused him to lose his ministry. During the conversation he asked if I would come and pray for him. I did not know that he was under a heavy bondage of alcohol and was being tormented by an evil spirit.

When I walked into the apartment, I sensed a strong tension in the atmosphere. This tension began to manifest as this man would move from a normal conversation to one of yelling and occasionally cursing.

After about forty-five minutes, his voice changed and another voice spoke through him. The demon spoke directly to me in the form of a satanic prophecy. The demon bragged that in a certain number of years, I would fall into the same trap as this minister. In other words, the same spirit that attacked this minister would also come against me and destroy my ministry. I would later learn that the demon spirit had targeted me at the same age of this minister when he came under attack!

I discerned what was happening. I stood up and grabbed the man by the collar. I said, “I’m not talking to an evil spirit. I’m talking to this man. When you want help I’ll be there for you. But I am not going to sit here and listen to a devil make predictions about me!” I walked out the door. (Thankfully, the man was later delivered and restored to a powerful ministry).

As I drove toward home I was gripped by fear. I thought, “I am a target. Something bad is going to happen.” The feeling I had would be similar to walking down a dark path in the woods, knowing that a sniper was waiting to fire a shot at your head.

Then I began to laugh. I said aloud, “The enemy sure is stupid. He gave me a timeframe for the attack. I’ll be on guard and have my intercessors begin to pray about this. He should have kept his mouth shut.”

Someone once said, “Give the enemy enough rope and he’ll hang himself.” I began to ask people to pray for me, without giving them the details of the warnings. I did not wish to confess any fear or anxiety regarding a “prophecy” from the enemy.

A YEAR LATER

A sudden attack did manifest twelve months later. Pam and I were close friends with a ministry couple, and she was very anointed and used by the Lord. We discovered that a family crisis arose, and the enemy came against the woman in a very sly manner. She was so overwhelmed that she was unable to recover (at least at that time) from the snare of the enemy. The situation was emotionally devastating to Pam and me.

Within days I began to encounter a mental assault that I had never experienced before. I lost all desire to preach, to minister, to read the Bible, or even to pray. I felt as though I wanted to get in a car and drive away. At first I thought it would pass in a few days. But days turned to weeks, and weeks turned into two months. A feeling of hopelessness and despair settled over me.

I began to write music, hoping this would help me. It did for a brief time, but the darkness and oppression continued. I could not discern why I was experiencing this. Was this an attack similar to the one Job experienced, where the enemy had asked to bring an attack to see what my response would be? Was I opening a door for the enemy to attack? Was this a season of attack against the ministry?

My wife knew something was wrong, but she was unable to discern the root, either. My emotional well-being continued to deteriorate for three months.

During this time, I traveled to Sofia, Bulgaria with a group of individuals from a local church, and we ministered in services throughout the area. Late one night I awoke to see a strange and fearful creature standing about two feet from the right side of my bed. It was tall with a wrinkled complexion and wiry gray hair. In my spirit I knew it was a strong prince spirit that was ruling over the city. At that point I recalled the warnings of the women from Romania twelve months earlier. My mind raced. This is it. This must be the warning I was given in Romania.

I recalled the fallen minister that I prayed for and the voice of an evil spirit that spoke through him. This former minister's father had suffered severe depression, and many years earlier he was found dead in his car with a gunshot wound to the

head. His son, the fallen minister, was so depressed the night I prayed for him that he later confessed he had a gun and was planning to shoot himself before I prayed for him. He was the same age as his father when the attack came against him. I realized that I was nearing the same age of both this man and his father when the claw of the adversary began to clamp down on my mind.

This was a satanic strategy planned years in advance. The Holy Spirit exposed it to my spirit.

But the assault continued. I attempted to rebuke it away and it remained. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone, even my own wife. I thought, "I've had to fight battles before, and I'll just have to fight this one, too." This was incorrect reasoning. Even Moses had Aaron and Hur to hold up his hands until the battle was over (Exodus 17:12). The gradual deliverance began the night I made a decision to publicly reveal the secret attack of Satan.

NOW HE CAN'T HIDE

It was the month of July and we were conducting a tent revival in Anniston, Alabama. I was able to preach at night with a measure of the anointing, but I was miserable during the day. One night, with over seven hundred people present, I felt something had to be done. I stopped ministering in the middle of my sermon and said, "Tonight I need to tell you folks something. I have been going through a terrible mental hell for several months. I need your prayers."

That night there were several close friends and ministry partners in the service. I gave an altar call to minister to other

people, but instead they encircled me. They said, “You are not leaving this tent until we pray for you. We are not allowing the enemy to take you down with this spiritual attack.”

Someone grabbed a bottle of anointing oil. Another one took my Bible and notebook from my hands. In a flash, people were laying hands on me, and my head was covered with anointing oil. They were jumping in the sawdust and praying so loudly I could hardly understand what any of them were saying. Suddenly, something broke. I began to laugh. It actually was very funny. There I stood, with sawdust all over my pants where my friends had shouted up a dust storm. My hair, which was longer at the time, was spiked up with anointing oil. My tie was covered with oil and my suit jacket was twisted halfway off my arms. I looked like I had just walked through a Texas tornado.

A small surge of the joy of the Lord seemed to float by and lock into my spirit. For the first time, I sensed relief. Most of all, I felt hope and an inner witness in my spirit that God was going to reverse the plan of the enemy and the prophecy of the devil!

A dear and faithful friend of the ministry came over to me, pointed her finger in my face and said, “You did it. He can’t hide now.”

I asked her, “Who can’t hide?”

She replied, “The enemy. As long as we never expose what he is doing, he will work in the darkness. But when we expose him to the light, he has nowhere to hide.”

Then it suddenly became clear. Satan hides in the darkness and God lives in the light. I had tried to fight this struggle alone, thinking that the Lord and I could handle it. All the time,

I needed the prayers of others. It was a new level of attack. I needed for my wife to know how I felt. It wasn't that I was too proud to tell anyone, I just thought it would eventually pass and the war would be over. But some victories do not come that easily.

LOOKING BACK TO EVALUATE

In retrospect, I think I understand what happened. For years I ministered only in America and had experience dealing with the spirits in our nation. But when I stepped into former communist nations to minister, I entered the realm of ancient prince spirits that had worked through atheistic governments and leaders. The level of warfare was very different from that to which I was accustomed. It would be similar to training men to fight in a desert war, then suddenly thrusting them into a mountainous nation covered with snow. Their knowledge of the terrain is geared toward one conflict, and now they are faced with another.

Someone might ask, "Aren't all spirits the same?" Not according to Jesus. On one occasion the disciples failed to deliver a demon possessed boy. Jesus said, "*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*" (Matthew 17:21). Jesus often encountered people possessed with a spirit; but one woman, Mary Magdalene, had seven spirits cast from her (Luke 8:2). The man of Gadara was controlled by about two thousands spirits that made him violent and dangerous (Mark 5:3). Those with only one evil spirit often became weak and passed out when Jesus prayed (Mark 9:26). But the man of Gadara had such supernatural strength that he could break

chains of iron and fetters in half with his power (Mark 5:4).

All Christians are not on the same level spiritually. The same is true with the spirit world; all angels are not on the same level of authority. In Daniel chapter 10, one angel of the Lord was unable to break through the restraining power of an evil prince spirit called the prince of Persia; but Michael the archangel came to the scene and immediately put the evil spirit in its place. (Daniel 10:1-13).

This explains why that, anytime we enter a new level in Christ, there will be new demonic spirits to encounter. At times they will use people to hinder and resist our efforts. Other times they will create circumstances to block our efforts. When I conducted our first camp meeting in Pigeon Forge, at least twenty-seven things broke down, went wrong, or were damaged as we prepared for the meeting. I said, "I will never do this meeting again if this is what we have to go through." That meeting has now become our main event that we plan every October. I learned that if the battle is great, the blessing will be greater!

We must use our full arsenal of weapons—the Word of God, the name of Jesus, the power of the blood of the Lamb, and our full armor. We must also understand the importance of not keeping something in the dark that should be exposed to the light.

ACOVENANT WITH YOUR SPOUSE OR FRIEND

Every believer needs a spiritual covering. This covering is

often found in the form of close personal friends in whom you can place complete confidence. Personally, there are several minister friends with whom I have a covenant. We share personal insight with one another, intercede for one another, and share any form of attack we are seeing with one another. These are men who would not betray a trust, but will hold up your hands until the battle is over.

Forming a covenant with your spouse is a great hedge against mental attacks. If you are married to a wonderful helpmate, such as I am, she (or he) should be your best friend and your most trusted confidant. To allow mental or spiritual battles to wreak confusion upon you, without telling your most trusted helper, is not a sign of your inner strength.

Understand that a spouse is often hesitant to express any kind of problem or temptation they might be encountering because they are afraid of their spouse's reaction. Many marriages could have been saved from division or divorce if the fear of confessing the problem had been removed and the companion had prayed for the husband or wife instead of considering the test a personal assault on their relationship.

People will encounter various types of temptations throughout different stages and cycles of life. The marriage covenant should be strong enough to endure pressure from within and from without, and each spouse in the relationship should believe that the other is worth saving and the marriage is worth fighting for.

A COVENANT OF COVERING

Form a covenant that says you will always be open with each

other and always cover the other person's back from the unexpected arrows that may be hurled toward you. After years of ministry and seasons of spiritual warfare, I can say with certainty that this important covenant of covering cannot be underestimated.

David and Jonathan had a covenant of covering. Saul was the king of Israel, David was his son-in-law, and Jonathan was Saul's son—meaning that David and Jonathan were brothers-in-law. Jonathan made a covenant of covering with David to protect him from his own father, Saul: *"Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul"* (1 Samuel 18:3).

On one particular occasion, Jonathan warned David not to come into the palace for Saul had placed a threat upon David's life (1 Samuel 19:2-18). This covenant of covering gave David an edge against Saul's strategies. A covenant of covering with a trusted friend or with your spouse will give you an advantage against the secret plans of the enemy.

A close and true friend will tell you when you are wrong. He or she will see you having a pity party and tell you to straighten up. Your companion will be a guard and a covering for you. One time my wife dreamed of a huge tarantula with a knife in its heart. It held no danger to us. But in the distance, another large tarantula was slowly creeping toward us. Pam knew we must deal with this second spider.

Shortly after this dream, someone came to me and asked if I would assist her in writing music and preparing for a music project. Pam discerned that this person was the warning in the dream. I trusted my wife's judgment and immediately informed the person that I would not be able to assist. Years later, we

learned that this woman became involved in an affair and divorced her husband.

Pam believes the enemy was attempting to set a snare for me, but the Lord gave her a warning and we responded. Warnings do little good if we do not pay attention to them.

This is why I always travel with my wife or with a male who is employed by our ministry. When my father was alive, he sometimes traveled with me. I trust myself, but it is not wise for a minister to be alone in some situations. The spouse or co-worker becomes a spiritual covering and will witness all the activities of the ministry so nobody can make a false accusation. The covenant of covering can help deny any hindering spirit the space in which to operate.

That day in Alabama when I publicly asked for prayer, many of the people who were present were personal friends, prayer intercessors, and other people whom Pam and I knew personally. They often prayed for us, and some had been in our home on various occasions. This is why I trusted sharing this need with them. But just to stand before a church and share your burden with the unburdened is a waste of energy. Those who respect you the most are those who love and care about you the most. These precious people will help form a covering for you.

Find somebody, either your spouse or a close and trusted friend, and make a covenant of covering with them so that, together, you can help defeat the plans of the enemy for your life.

Over the years I have suggested to ministers with global ministries that, as they grow, they should also build a prayer

base so they will have a prayer covering with committed intercessors standing in the gap and bearing the weight and pressure that comes with leadership. Years ago, Bea Ogle felt the need to build an intercessory prayer team to cover the Voice of Evangelism ministry. Today, the Daughters of Rachel have over sixteen hundred woman across the nation who are committed to praying for our ministry, family, ministry needs, and the requests of the other prayer intercessors.

Aunt Bea, as we call her, was a member of the same church where the hindering spirit appeared during the five-week revival and caused all that difficulty. Out of the crisis that unfolded came a need for a prayer hedge, and from the battle came a blessing and a secret weapon—hundreds of women who pray! At times they have received spiritual warnings of impending attacks of the enemy, and these darts of the enemy were quenched. Our lives have been protected from premature death due to the simple obedience of women who pray. If we encounter new devils at new levels, then we need an advanced weapon. Build an arsenal of spiritual warriors who know how to pray!

CHAPTER 7

SATAN'S PLAN AGAINST THE CHURCH

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

– JOHN 8:44

IT WAS AROUND twelve o'clock midnight, and a couple of hours earlier we had concluded a powerful service at Free Chapel Worship Center in Gainesville, Georgia. I had returned to the hotel with my wife and son, and I felt a strong urge to pray in the Holy Spirit. Within moments I was sitting on the bed, praying in my prayer language. The prayer became more powerful and, even though I was praying in an unknown language, I was able to interpret what the Holy Spirit was praying. The Lord was telling me, *“I am going to show you the final assignment of Satan that will transpire against the church.”*

I grabbed a pen and jotted down this word from the Lord. Then I continued to pray in the Spirit. Suddenly the understanding became clear again, and from that time until 2:45 a.m., the Holy Spirit began to pour into my spirit an end time revelation that I believe is an important unveiling of spiritual warfare for the body of Christ.

This was not a “new” revelation. The final assault of Satan against the church was penned in the pages of the Holy Scriptures two thousand years ago. This was simply an illumination (light) being cast upon prophetic Scriptures.

The following day I spent several hours at a desk, writing the words on paper that God had given me the night before. I could hardly wait for the service, because I knew this was a timely word, directly from the heart of the Lord.

That night as I ministered, the presence of God descended as a blanket of conviction over the people. By the conclusion of the service, I was weeping almost uncontrollably. That night, God did a supernatural work among the people that I wasn’t aware of until sometime later.

After the service, Pastor Jentezen Franklin and I were in his office. He said over and over, “Perry, you just don’t know what God did. You have no idea. That message you preached must be put into the hands of people across the nation. Please print a book, or do something to get the message out there. It could rescue churches and even pastors who are about to quit.”

I am placing this message in this book, not because the church needs another book. As Solomon once said, “Of the making of books there is no end.” I am placing this strong word in print with the hope that the truth herein will be placed into

the hands of those who need it most. The final war is on!

THE FOUR NAMES OF THE ADVERSARY

In the Old Testament there was a revelation of the only true God. While there is one God, there are many names in the Bible that reveal His character and nature. For example, in Psalm 91:1-2 there are four different Hebrew names of God used in two verses:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the almighty.

“I will say of the Lord, he is my fortress and my refuge, my God in him will I trust.”

In the Hebrew text, there are four names of God given in this powerful passage: El (God), El Elyon (Most High), El Shaddai (Almighty), and YHVH (Lord).

Just as these four names reveal the character and nature of God, the adversary—often called the devil or Satan—is also given four names that are found recorded in the book of Revelation.

In the final vision concerning the time of the end, John received a unique vision of Satan and his spiritual command center in the heavens. It reminds us of Paul’s words, “Satan...the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). The vision was of a woman in travail, who was about to give birth to a man child. Satan, who is seen as a great red dragon, is near the woman with the intention of devouring the child before He

is born (Revelation 12:1-4).

During this war in the heavens, John reveals the four names of our archenemy, Satan. John calls him: the dragon, Satan, the devil, and that old serpent.

Oddly enough, back in Psalm 91:13 we discover three enemies that we must be protected from—a lion, an adder, and a dragon. Moses wrote, *“Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under feet.”*

The lion is an enemy that you can hear but might not always see. A lion can be too far away for you to see, and yet the powerful roar can make it seem much closer than it is. The adder is an enemy that can hide under a rock, and you might not know it is there until you feel it bite. The dragon is a creature of the imagination, because dragons do not exist. Therefore we see that, symbolically, the attacks from the enemy originate through our hearing, our feeling, and our imagination.

Why does the Bible use the word dragon to describe our enemy? A closer look at the word dragon in the Greek Scriptures will help us understand. The word is *drakon* in Greek and it means, “a serpent.” John describes Satan as a seven-headed dragon, or a seven-headed serpent.

The Old Testament word is *leviathan*, which is found in Isaiah 27:1 and other places. In the Old Testament, the dragon is always coming up out of the sea, which represents in prophecy the nations of people. Prophetically, these seven heads represent the seven major empires of Bible prophecy, and they can allude to the seven chief prince spirits that rule over the seven continents of the world.

In the Revelation account, one name of the enemy stands out if we continue to examine the Scripture. It is the name *devil*. This word is used in the plural form, devils, to describe spirits that are part of Satan's kingdom. The Bible speaks of a man with "a devil." Then we discover the phrase "the devil." The devil is a specific person, namely Satan himself, who is the leader of the fallen angels.

The Greek word for devil is *diabolos*. It comes from two words, *dia* meaning divide and *bolos* meaning through. It can mean to divide through or to throw through. One meaning alludes to a large steel ball beating against a wooden wall until it breaks through the wall. The enemy is attempting to send fiery darts (Ephesians 6:11-18), until he finds a crack in your armor.

Another meaning of the word is slanderer. Often people picture Satan as a creature with huge wings, horns, and a red flaming face, flying throughout the earth randomly selecting a few victims to fry on his huge pitchfork. This medieval image of Satan changed with our advanced culture, from an actual fallen angel to a dark force that is within each person. Throughout history, man's perception of Satan has changed.

THE UNEMPLOYED ANGEL WITH NO CREDIBILITY

Satan's problem these days is twofold. First, his arsenal is old. He has used the same weapons for centuries; and now, much of the church is aware of his devices. Secondly, he has no credibility. Any verbal assault from the secular media or from non-Christian sources is now exposed and determined to be an

assault upon the church from Satan.

Satan is essentially an unemployed angel who was cast out of heaven and is biding his time until he is cast into the bottomless pit. The problem, however, is that he is not leaving without a fight and a final assault. He is coming down with great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time (Revelation 12:12).

We first find Satan in the Garden of Eden. Here he told a lie to Eve, saying that if she ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would never die (Genesis 3). This was contrary to God's command not to eat of the tree, for if they did, they would die. Thus began the lie and deception.

For centuries Satan has lied in an attempt to destroy great men and women of God. The lie has been his most potent weapon. A lie can destroy your name, your reputation, your credibility, your job, and your family. I once heard of a minister who was accused of having an affair with a woman in the church. The lie cost him the church, his ministry, and his wife. Years later, the accuser confessed on her deathbed that she had lied about the preacher out of jealousy. The woman died a tormented soul, but the same minister today has a church with thousands of members.

Joseph was falsely accused of having an affair with Potiphar's wife. She even pulled off Joseph's coat so that she could use it as "evidence" to have him arrested. It is impossible to prove you were not in the woman's house when she has your coat in her bedroom! The woman never retracted her lie, but God was with Joseph in the prison and moved him from the prison to the palace.

Not every story has a happy ending, though. One such example is the Apostle Paul. Toward the end of his ministry, he was in Rome, in his own hired house. But an event occurred in Rome that would bring great persecution against Christians.

The evil Roman emperor Nero desired to change parts of Rome and the Senate voted against it. In a mad rage, Nero burned Rome and blamed it on the Christians. As a result, the Christians in Rome experienced intense persecution. Nero arrested Paul and used him as a scapegoat, blaming him for setting the fire.

Nero spread the lie that Paul was responsible, and the lie traveled across the grapevine of the early church. This was being discussed throughout the Roman Empire and Asia.

One can imagine the comments. “Did you hear that Paul set fire to Rome? He set Rome on fire? Has he lost his mind? Look at the persecution he is causing us!”

The lie was so effective that Paul wrote a letter and said, “All of Asia has forsaken me.” Oh, the damage that one lie can do.

A lie was also an effective weapon used against the ministry of Jesus. He was accused of casting out devils by the power of the devil and using magic to cure the sick. At the end of His ministry, the religious hypocrites found the lie that nailed His body to the cross. They accused Jesus of blasphemy! They took a comment out of context and claimed that Jesus said that He would destroy Herod’s Temple in three days and build it up again. Jesus never said anything about Herod’s Temple being destroyed in three days. He was speaking about His own death and resurrection. Yet, by misquoting His statement, they made

Jesus appear to say something that He never said. A half-truth is still a whole lie, because nothing is true unless it is one hundred percent true.

Since Satan has no credibility, you would not believe his lie. Or would you? Perhaps it depends on who is telling the lie.

I'll use myself as an example. If someone came to you and said, "Such and such network is doing an exposé about television ministers, and they are going to destroy Perry Stone's ministry," what would you say? Knowing how biased the secular media can be against ministries, and knowing that they often have an agenda, you would (hopefully) use great caution and discernment when viewing such a program. Networks have been sued for lying and deceiving the public, so knowing this, you might be skeptical.

However, if somebody who has worked for my ministry for twenty years came forward with harmful information about the ministry, how would you react? Would you view this person in the same manner that you viewed the television station that did the exposé? Most likely you would not. You would likely accept that person's word as fact because it was coming from an inside source. The person on the inside should have more credibility. But does being on the "inside" give someone automatic credibility as a factual source?

People will accept information coming from those who are deemed to be "in the know." Yet consider this. Peter was also in the inner circle. This rough fisherman was always quick to speak and act. He is the fellow who, in his zeal to prove that he was faithful to Jesus, struck a servant of the high priest and used his sword to cut an ear right off the man's head. But five

hours later he sat by the fire and found himself “in the fire” by denying Christ and cursing, just to make sure he did not get arrested. Imagine the headlines: Pentecostal preacher caught cursing God.

Wasn't Judas on the inside of Jesus's ministry? When a woman broke open a box of ointment and anointed Jesus, Judas became angry because the woman wasted money. He said the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. So if Judas went to the Jerusalem press with the story, the headlines might have read: Jesus accused of misusing funds.

Judas couldn't handle the pressure of his moral failure when he turned in Jesus to the authorities, so he grabbed a rope and found a tree near a cliff. He wrapped a noose around his neck, jumped, and snapped his neck. The tree branch on which he was hanging broke, and his corpse fell to the bottom of the canyon (Acts 1:18). Perhaps the headlines the next day would have read: Christian treasurer commits suicide after misappropriation of funds.

What about the naked disciple in the garden of Gethsemane? Here's one that is seldom preached in the resurrection sermon. The disciple heard of Christ's arrest in the garden, and he jumped from bed, grabbed a sheet, and headed into the garden. Suddenly a soldier grabbed the sheet and the disciple took off running, naked. A good flash photograph on the front page of the Jerusalem Post would have devastated many Believers as they read the headline: Preacher caught streaking in Gethsemane.

Within three days, Jesus's entire ministry team had begun to

fall apart. One killed himself, another was caught cursing, and another ran streaking into the night. Most were heading to the hills and trying to escape a possible trial of their own for being associated with Jesus. Then let us not forget that, after the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas complained that he didn't believe a resurrection was possible because he didn't see Jesus alive.

The lies against Jesus continued, even when He was raised from the dead. Roman guards were paid to say, "While we slept the disciples stole the body." This lie wouldn't have been believable, though, since the disciples were locked behind closed doors for fear of their own fate. They didn't even unlock the door for Jesus. He had to walk through it! This group doesn't sound like a radical bunch of body snatchers.

Satan kept lying. As the early church grew, someone forged a letter with Paul's signature, telling the church at Thessalonica that they had missed the return of the Lord. The congregation was devastated, and Paul had to write to them and warn them not to be troubled by word or letter allegedly coming from him that the day of the Lord had arrived.

What a low blow, forging a signature on a piece of paper that could destroy the faith of an entire church. But the devil will stop at nothing to halt the momentum of a great church. Paul set the record straight by penning the second epistle to the Thessalonians.

Toward the end of Paul's ministry, another lying spirit found its way into the church. Two noted men were teaching people that the resurrection had already passed, and Paul said they had already overthrown the faith of some. Forged letters, false

teachers, and liars—all lying in the name of God!

Before you judge these terrible acts of a few rebels in the first century church, consider what is happening in the church today. Satan has a master plan to destroy you, your ministry, and your church by using other Christians as his tools!

CHAPTER 8

CHRISTIANS WHO DESTROY WITH THEIR MOUTHS

“And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.”

– REVELATION 12:15

SATAN IS CONSIDERED a dragon. In ancient stories, the dragon nearly always breathes fire out of his mouth. If the Bible said, the serpent breathed fire, then we could relate this to a fiery trial, because fire can represent certain trials according to 2 Peter. But what about water?

In Scripture, water is often used to symbolize the Holy Spirit. “With joy we draw water from the wells of salvation,” or “Out of the belly shall flow rivers of living water.” We also find, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon dry ground, I will pour my Spirit out upon thy seed and my blessings upon thy offspring.” Since water can represent the Holy Spirit, and since Satan cannot and never will have the

Holy Spirit, what is being revealed to us in Revelation 12:15?

This passage deals with the nation of Israel and how that Satan will attempt to destroy the remnant of Jews when they are living in Petra during the tribulation. But this verse also gives us a present truth about the plan of Satan against the church. Scripture can have a primary and a secondary meaning, a prophetic meaning, and a practical application.

The serpent opens his mouth. Five verses prior in Revelation 12:10, we are told that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. In order to accuse, he must open his mouth. The serpent has his mouth open, but water is coming out. And water can represent, among other things, the Holy Spirit. As I was meditating upon this, the Holy Spirit began to reveal Satan's ultimate end time attack in this verse.

Satan has no credibility. A true Believer will not accept his lies; but what if a Christian begins to make an accusation? Suddenly it has some credibility because it is coming from the mouth of somebody who has the "living water" flowing through them.

Hear this message. *Satan is going to use Christians—including Spirit-filled Christians—in the last days to make statements against men and women of God, in both the pulpit and the pew.* The enemy has discovered that outward persecution cannot put a crack in our armor. The church unifies under persecution, and Satan desires, not unity, but disruption from an eruption! Therefore, if leaders in the church, or important families, or those sitting in the pews can begin to complain and accuse, then the serpent will be spewing water out of his mouth to bring a flood.

In scripture, a flood usually comes from a sudden storm. In this case, the words of fellow Believers create a sudden flood against others in the church. Have you ever attempted to swim in strong currents? You struggle to keep your head above water, and your arms and feet become very weary from treading water. Your hands represent your works, and your feet represent your ministry and your walk with God. When people are spreading gossip and attempting to damage your reputation, it is like swimming in a flood; your work and your walk become affected, and you become very weary.

David experienced this when the battle became long between the “house of David and the house of Saul.” Somewhat exhausted, David cried out, “I am weak this day though anointed king!” Even the most anointed people can become battle weary when the battle within the house seems never-ending.

HOW SATAN GETS HIS CREDIBILITY

Satan has discovered how to gain credibility. If he can speak through the mouth of a well-known and respected Christian, then the lie will look like the truth.

Many years ago there were three ministers, all involved in television. One minister became jealous over the success of a fellow minister, who was pastoring a very large church. The pastor was loved and respected in his denomination. The jealous minister discovered that the pastor had experienced a moral failure with a woman in the church. At the same time, the jealous man was removed from a television network that went into fifteen million homes. Angry, he set out to “expose” both

the owner of the network and the pastor who had fallen into sin.

I believe that if a person has failed God, confessed and repented of the sin, and is no longer committing the sin, that sin should not be re-exposed and discussed again, except perhaps as a testimony of God's mercy and restoration. In this case, the sin was not only brought up, but was exposed for the whole world to see, long after the individual had already repented, made things right with God and others, and was not living in sin.

The minister who boldly exposed the two ministers was himself coming under a severe attack of the enemy. The same sin he was exposing in others was the same spirit that came against him. Two years later, he was exposed and his problems were so severe that not many in the Christian world could even believe it happened.

That same minister said that he often prayed and sought God for victory, but at the time could not get victory. Confusion swept the body of Christ. How could this dynamic man of God fall so low? The answer is that his judgmental words against others opened the door for the same type of spirit to come against him.

WHEN INTERCESSORS FAIL

A true intercessor can sometimes seem like an odd person. The local church might be in the middle of a great revival, with people packing out the building each night. The choir is jumping and the altars are filled. And there is Sister Jones, the sixty-year old grandmother, hugging the wall in despair, with

tears streaming down her cheeks. Why isn't she shouting like everybody else? Because through prayer, she knows a church split is coming.

Five months later it happens. Now the choir is only half full, there is a shortage of musicians, and those left in the congregation sit like soldiers wounded in battle. But Sister Jones is dancing all over the church, because she has been in deep prayer and has seen the church full again.

We read in Scripture that Christ prayed at the fourth watch, which began at three o'clock in the morning. He saw the disciples toiling against the contrary winds in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. It was still dark, so how could anybody see three miles from the top of a mountain to the middle of a seven-mile-wide lake?

The word *see* in this passage is a Greek word meaning "to perceive with the spirit." Christ did not literally see them with His natural eyes; He perceived through His spiritual eyes that they were in danger.

Prayer brings an increase in spiritual perception. Just as Elijah prayed and God revealed to him the secret plans of the Assyrian army, intercessors on assignment can often tap into the realm of the spirit and pick up pieces of a grave strategic plan of our adversary.

A true God-anointed intercessor is one who perceives with the Spirit, stands in the gap, and prays on behalf of the pastor and the congregation. They are like the Old Testament watchmen on the wall. They pray, discern the seasons of the church, and foresee attacks of the enemy while they are still being planned. At times they will see certain weaknesses in the

ministry or the church staff, and this is where they can make a serious error that could become an open door for the serpent.

The intercessor might get together with other people to discuss the problem and share with others information that should be kept hidden in their heart. Since the church is comprised of either meat eaters (the spiritually mature) or milk drinkers (the spiritually immature), information meant for prayer should never be made public and placed into the hands of weak members in the church.

For example, if I went to a mature elder in the church and said, “There is evidence that the clerk is stealing money from the church,” the mature person would handle this the Biblical way with two or three witnesses in private. This keeps the entire church from suffering reproach because of one person’s sins. If the clerk does not listen, then it is brought before the elders. The reason you do not announce a problem to the entire church is because you do not want the entire church to suffer reproach because of one person’s sins. Weak Christians will be affected by the other person’s sin and say, “I knew it. The church is full of hypocrites. I’m quitting if they’re going to steal my money.”

Instead of gossiping under the guise of a prayer request, the intercessor should cover the situation with prayer and not spread the information within a circle of friends. God shows you things so that you will pray; not so that you can gossip.

Look at the examples of Noah and King Saul. Noah was a hero to at least seven people—his wife, his sons, and their wives. After the flood, Noah planted a vineyard and got drunk, then lay in a cave naked. Ham went into the cave and saw his

dad in this pitiful condition and told the other two brothers. The two walked in backwards to cover their father.

Why did two sons cover him? Who was going to find out about this? It wasn't as though the denominational headquarters might hear about it and take away Noah's ministerial credentials. The newspaper couldn't report it because Noah and his family were the only people alive. But this was their dad, and he was a man of faith. They never wanted their father to know they saw him in this condition, so they covered him without looking at him.

You might be saying, "But we should not cover sin. The Bible says that he who covers his sin shall not prosper." That is correct. But God will expose sin. Our job is to keep a continual prayer covering over our minister, church and family. There will always be people who see a weakness and run from the cave (the church) and tell everybody, "Guess what I saw?" But a true prayer warrior and a mature Believer will never use what they have seen or heard to destroy and damage a person of faith.

Consider King Saul. He was David's father-in-law, yet Saul was consumed with jealousy toward David. One time a group of women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." Saul began to have a pity party. He made twenty-one attempts to kill David, but never one time did David retaliate against Saul. In fact, on two occasions David had an open door to take Saul out, but he refused to step into that door. David said, "I cannot touch the Lord's anointed."

Many people today are too bold to speak against men and women who are anointed of God. David would never criticize

Saul, even after knowing the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Today we would say that Saul used to have it, but he lost it. Or we might say that old Saul needs to step down and let David take the kingdom. We might even hear people comment, “King Saul is no king of mine. I’m a David man. I hope God removes him soon!”

When people observe a possible problem and begin to talk about it instead of pray about it, their words can give the demonic spirit world the authority to go into operation against that person.

JESUS INTERCEDED IN ADVANCE

The men were gathered for supper. Judas had his hand on the table and his heart on the money (Luke 22:21). Betrayal was already in progress and Christ knew it. Ancient writers had pierced the veil of time and written about this moment in Psalms 41:9 when it was said that “mine own familiar friend has forsaken me.” Judas was the target of Satan. Something evil was hidden in his heart and Satan was able to gain a stronghold. Perhaps handling the finances of the world’s greatest preacher inflated his ego and caused him to think he ought to have a share of the income. Thirty pieces of silver were waiting for him at the Temple once he completed his assignment.

Another incident was never prophesied in history, but Jesus was aware of the attack in advance because he prayed. I am speaking of the fall of Simon Peter.

At the supper, Jesus did something unusual. He referred to Peter by his former name, Simon. This was the name his mother

had given him at birth, and in the Aramaic it means, “to be shaken as a reed in the wind.” Truly this was Simon’s personality. Jesus gave him a new name in Matthew 16:18 when he said, “Thou art Peter.” His new name means, “a small stone.” Christ was telling Simon Peter that He was putting him on a solid foundation. God changed his name because He was changing his destiny.

God often changed a person’s name when He was about to change their identity. The father of the faith was Abram, but God changed his name to Abraham. His wife’s name was Sarai until the Lord was about to make her the mother of nations. At that point He changed her name to Sarah. The same was true with an assistant to Moses whose original name was Oshea (Num. 13:8 and 16). Moses changed his name from Oshea to Joshua, which means, “the Lord is our salvation.” As Joshua, he would direct the people into battle in the Promised Land.

We also discover another truth in Scripture when God calls a person’s name twice. Notice that God said, “Abraham, Abraham. Sarah, Sarah. Saul, Saul.” God does this to get a person’s attention, but also to reveal that a major change is coming. When Jesus spoke to Peter in Luke 22:31, He did not say, “Peter, Peter,” but He said, “Simon, Simon.” Jesus used his former name as though to emphasize that Peter’s former nature was about to resurface. He would be shaken in the wind again.

Jesus exposed a hidden agenda against Peter’s life when he said, “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired you that he may sift you as wheat...*”

There are several interesting words in the text itself. First is the word *desired*. The Greek word used here is *exaiteo*, meaning

to demand something; to obtain by asking. It is a strong word which implies that Satan actually went before God and demanded the opportunity to sift Peter. Recall the story of Job, when Satan went before the presence of God and accused Job of serving God for an ulterior motive. Satan essentially said, "Let me shake Peter and he will fall flat on his face and never get up."

The test was about to unfold. This brings up the question, why didn't Satan attempt to sift the other ten disciples? Judas was already in his hand, and Peter was about to be under his feet. But why Peter? I believe the answer might be found in the incident that occurred immediately after Simon received his name change.

Matthew records the moment. Jesus was conducting a private board meeting. The twelve were gathered around the table and the CEO of the ministry, Jesus, asked a thought-provoking question: "*Who do you say that I am?*"

Each disciple was given an opportunity to answer. One said, "Some say you are John the Baptist." Another one shouts, "I've heard folks say you are Jeremiah!" Still another blurts out, "And others believe you are the prophet Elijah." Jesus pauses and leans forward with another question, "But who do YOU say that I am?"

Without hesitation, Simon jumped to his feet and exclaimed, "I say that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

Right answer, Peter! A feeling of pride must have covered Peter's heart as Jesus then gave Peter a word: "*Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. And I say also*

unto thee that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:17-18).

We understand this prophecy. Christ is the foundation of the church. Yet if we continue to read, it almost appears that Jesus is giving Peter certain authority that none of the other disciples will receive: *“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).*

Imagine having the transfer of authority from the Son of God, and being given the ability to bind and loose things in heaven! Satan is the prince of the power of the air, and now he is being challenged by a prophecy revealing that he will experience defeat at the hands of men.

Did Satan hear this prophecy? Certainly he did. Only three verses later, Jesus had to rebuke Peter for telling Him that He would not suffer death. Jesus commanded, *“Get behind me, Satan...”* Moments before, Peter was beaming with pride because of his revelation concerning Jesus, and now he is blushing with embarrassment. Satan shot a fiery dart into Peter’s mind and he spoke without spiritual direction.

At that moment, Satan began his assignment against Peter. Why? Even today certain churches believe that Peter was given the keys to the kingdom. Perhaps you have heard the “Saint Peter” stories of how Peter is allowing people into heaven or rejecting them at the gates. Much of this tradition is based upon this story in the Bible. Yet, we know that every Believer is given spiritual authority over Satan.

During that important meeting, it would seem that Peter was going to be the man with the authority of the church. Satan knows what has been revealed and often appears to base his assignments and spiritual assaults upon the knowledge that is revealed. From this moment, Satan had a bulls-eye set on Peter. Out of all the other disciples, Peter suddenly became the most important. The prophecy proves it.

Look back at an earlier story of Jesus. One day at the Jordan River, Jesus stepped into the chilly waters to be baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist. As the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven said, *"This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."* For the first time, God announced to the world that this was His Son!

Notice what follows. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil for forty days and nights. Satan challenged the voice from heaven. He demanded proof that Jesus was the Son of God. If He could turn stones into bread and jump from the pinnacle of the Temple and land without harm, this would prove that He was the Son of God. The public prophecy led to a private conflict and Satan challenged what God said.

Through many years of ministry, I have observed that when a person receives a prophetic word about something God will do in their life, often chaos breaks out. The battle intensifies over the revealed will of God. In the mind of the adversary, Peter was the pivotal person to lead the church, based on a prediction from Jesus. Satan desired to sift Peter, but Jesus had already stood in the gap!

Jesus said, *“Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed that your faith would fail not...”* (Luke 22:31-32). The purpose of intercession is for more than exposing the plan of the enemy; it is also for keeping the plan from becoming effective.

MISTAKES IN THE SPIRIT REALM

A lie is ineffective as long as it remains in the spirit realm. Prince spirits and rulers of darkness can call an assembly to design a perfect plot against a Believer. Often the intent is to destroy the credibility of the man or woman of God, thus causing their words to become unfruitful in the ears of the listener.

When a well-known minister sins, the rumors begin to fly. Facts are often distorted and outright lies are birthed, sometimes by the media. Within weeks, all kinds of stories are circulating from so-called reliable sources, and when the dust settles, few of the stories are factual. The reliable sources turned out to be real lie-able.

When a person's name is ruined, their credibility is questioned. Once credibility is lost, then the message is weakened. A weakened message will be ineffective and will not produce spiritual results. Ministers whose voices once brought sinners running down the aisles are now a single voice shouting in a wilderness to a handful of followers. Sinners who once sat frozen in conviction in front of a television now laugh at the image of once-great spiritual warriors who found themselves caught in the snare of the enemy.

The assault of the adversary is more than just temptation.

Yes, temptation is the first level of intrusion in the mind of a Believer. But the final war will wage over gossip, criticism, and offense from other Christians.

True prayer intercessors have double vision. They see in the natural and they see in the spirit. They often sense trouble before it arrives. This is especially true with the seasoned elderly Believers in the established Full Gospel churches. These “old timers” have prayed so much that they can smell a wolf in sheep’s clothing as he makes his way through the parking lot.

The great danger, however, is in how God’s people expose those plans without creating suspicion or confusion in the church. Join me in a hypothetical home Bible study, where the leader makes a stunning announcement: “Group, I was in a time of deep prayer and the Lord showed me something we must pray about. I saw the enemy trying to get our pastor into pride. We know that pride comes before destruction, and we need to pray that the devil won’t destroy our pastor with pride. After all, the church is growing and he is on television, so he might get lifted up. It could happen, so let’s pray.”

The intercessor did a right thing in a wrong way. Without realizing it, he has opened the door for the enemy to begin a gossip campaign against the pastor. Those present will probably leave the house and later share this request with others. Soon the word is out, and the people in the church begin to watch for warning signs that the pastor is falling into pride. They critique every word and movement, and even the way he and his wife are dressing.

This group leader, unintentionally perhaps, opened a door

for people to criticize the pastor in the name of spiritual concern. The leader might have sensed a spiritual burden, but he should have shared it directly with the pastor and not a group of Christians who, through their open mouths, will give the demonic spirit realm the authority to operate. A good pastor will appreciate the love and concern from a caring member who is praying for him without gossiping about him.

Let's join another conversation among a group in a church: "Ladies, I felt impressed of the Spirit to share something with you that cannot go beyond these walls. I feel our minister of music is eyeing some of the women in the choir. He came to me the other day and shook my hand, and I felt a strange spirit coming from him. We need to bind this spirit and begin to pray against it, before he falls into immorality."

Again, the burden might be genuine, but it was handled incorrectly. From that point, it will become a natural tendency for the group to carefully observe and report among themselves any suspicious activity. Eventually they will not even be able to enjoy the worship because they are too busy watching the music pastor to see who he might have his eye on. If he smiles at someone, it will be perceived as flirtatious. If he compliments a female on a song and perhaps pats her shoulder in the process, he is suddenly guilty of sexual harassment.

Without the pastor ever falling into pride or the music minister becoming adulterous, the enemy has now gained an entrance in the church body through people who exposed a possible attack in the wrong manner. After years of ministry, I have seen many Christians who have claimed the gift of discernment, but who instead operated in a gift of suspicion.

Having a feeling of suspicion about something is not the same as God showing you something.

Once I received an e-mail from a man who saw me on our television program, Manna-fest. After reviewing the program and watching me offer a resource packet, he wrote to inform me that he had discerned me to be a false prophet. He gave no reason for that so-called discernment, and went on to ramble for several paragraphs as he griped about all television ministers. Finally, in his last statement, he mentioned that something I taught was heresy. In the end, he concluded that I was a false prophet because I taught something he didn't agree with. His discernment was actually his disagreement. He cloaked his argumentative spirit in the rags of spirituality and spoke as a representative of God to correct my error. He should have simply said, "I didn't agree with your teaching."

There is a right way and a wrong way to deal with the pre-assigned attacks of Satan. We must be careful what we speak, lest we give the spirit world a key to unlock a door that will unleash supernatural forces against the individual Believer. An unusual passage of Scripture in Ecclesiastes 10:20 bears this out: *"Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in your bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice and that which has wings shall tell the matter."*

According to Mark chapter four, in the parable of the sower, the bird came to steal the seed that was sown. Jesus interpreted the birds to represent evil spirits and Satan, who comes after the Word is planted (sown) into the heart of the listener and will immediately remove it. Evil spirits can take the words we say in secret and plan their strategies accordingly. Judas plotted against Jesus behind closed doors of the Temple,

after Satan entered his heart at the supper table. What was planned in secret became known; and eventually, Judas was driven to commit suicide.

Instead of proclaiming that our minister might fall and our church is headed for trouble, we should follow the example of Jesus when he prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail. Christ predicted Peter's attack, but also prophesied restoration before Satan's assignment ever began. It is this preventive prayer that can restrain the battle plans of the enemy!

PREVENTIVE PRAYER

On three occasions in my life, I was involved in a car accident. One at age three and two at age nine. Prior to each of the accidents at age nine, I recall my father coming under a heavy burden to pray. One time we were visiting relatives and I remember hearing dad groan in intercession for about three hours before our family headed home from a vacation. Only minutes down the road, we were involved in an automobile accident, although none of us suffered injuries.

Another time Dad went into this condition of travail and I thought, "Oh no, I hope we don't crash the car again." Late that night my mother was driving and the rest of us were asleep in the car. She, too, fell asleep as she was driving and veered into the left lane toward oncoming traffic, which happened to be an 18-wheeler. The driver blew his horn and tried to slow down to avoid a serious accident. Just in time, Mom jerked the steering wheel to the right and the car landed backwards down a small embankment, where it was stopped by a tree. Thankfully we were all uninjured. The truck driver stopped to

make sure we were okay, and he said that it appeared to him that somebody had picked up our car and moved it.

The Lord knew what awaited us, and through listening to the burden and stopping to pray, I believe that lives were spared and the plan of the enemy was stopped.

On another occasion while in prayer, Dad was given a vision of two demonic spirits—one small and one larger—and he overheard their conversation about me. The larger spirit was reprimanding the smaller spirit for allowing me to get access to information that could cause great damage to the kingdom of darkness.

The smaller spirit defended itself saying, “I don’t know how he got the information. I watched him day and night to make sure he didn’t get the information. I did everything to sidetrack him.”

The larger spirit reached into the smaller spirit and removed something—perhaps some kind of power that had been given. With that, the larger spirit said, “He has the information and he’s publishing it. If he goes forward with this and does much harm to us, I’ll kill him. If you can’t take care of this, I’ll do it myself.”

Indeed the enemy did make attempts on my life the following year. But through prayer and fasting, the Lord allowed Dad to tap into the spirit realm and hear the plans of the enemy so that we could pray and thwart those plans.

The enemy’s plan is to steal, kill and destroy. God does not reveal the plans of Satan for us to meet with people and tell everybody what the enemy wants to do. When God reveals something, we should immediately begin to pray, and through

our prayers, stop the momentum of the enemy before the front line assault is put into action.

COVERING YOUR BACK

When Paul wrote about the armor of God in Ephesians chapter six, he was comparing this important equipment to the armor worn by the Roman soldiers. It has been stated that the armor protected the soldier from head to toe. But some Roman armor was made without protection in the back. The reason is because the Roman military never wanted to see their warriors run from the battle. They left their backs open to arrows and spears so that the soldier would always stand his ground and face his opponent.

In the body of Christ are three levels of relationships: face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder, and back-to-back. Face to face is how we know one another when we gather to worship in God's house. We recognize each other's faces. This is fellowship, and we can sing, worship and pray together, but still know very little about each other personally.

Shoulder-to-shoulder speaks of involvement together as we carry the burden for the work of God. Together we might bear one another's burdens and carry each other's loads. This brings a new level to the relationship. You can really get to know someone when you work with them. This is where we develop a closer relationship and learn to appreciate the person's value in the ministry.

The third level is back-to-back. In Roman times, they would place two men in an arena and arm them with swords to fight another group of men. This was not a game; it was a matter of

life and death. The two men stood back-to-back and either locked one arm or joined one hand and gripped their sword with the other hand. As they fought the enemies, they were watching each other's backs. If their companion was killed, it meant their own back was open to the sword. Therefore, they fought back-to-back, knowing that the other soldier was not only fighting his own battle, but protecting his friend as well.

Satan's assaults could be stopped immediately if people would cover one another's backs. All the backstabbing and wounds caused by rumors, innuendos, and gossip would hit a brick wall if people would say, "I'm not going to listen to that. Change the subject."

In the church, we understand face-to-face and shoulder-to-shoulder relationships. But we need to cover each other's backs. One Christian should never be able to place a knife in the back of another brother or sister in the Lord. Believers should have the attitude that they have to come through me first, and I will not allow the stabs and jabs to be thrust into my fellow Believer. If we do not protect one another, who will?

According to a recent survey, seventy percent of all pastors in America feel that they do not have a personal friend they can confide in. They are reluctant to be too transparent in front of anyone, lest they become an object of ridicule and mockery. This must change. We must begin to allow those in ministry to become more transparent and realize that they are anointed human beings, but humans nonetheless. People need to be reminded that we were men and women before we were men and women of God.

I believe one reason Joyce Meyer is such an effective and

popular teacher is because she will tell you anything and everything she has gone through. I heard a man say, "I would never tell folks some of the things I've gone through the way Joyce does." Yet the average person appreciates the honesty, transparency, and humility of the person who will confess the troubles they've gone through in an effort to help others who are dealing with the same problems.

Sometimes ministers present a picture of personal perfection, and the media has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars digging into someone's past, only to discover something they had covered up. It would have been better in the long run to confess they did something wrong or made some mistake than to be faced with confessing that they lied about it.

Years ago I became so angry at a staff member that I said a word I shouldn't have said. I apologized, but months later this person told family and friends what I had said in an attempt to harm the ministry. I have used that story as an example of why it is important to control your temper. People are glad to know they are not the only ones this has happened to.

How many times will people sit at a dinner table and hear fellow Christians criticize and malign a church or minister across town? People will have roasted preacher for lunch and sit like vultures picking people apart, until all that's left is the bare bones of a fellow Christian.

God asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" And Cain answered, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain had already murdered his brother over an offering. Imagine that! The first murder in the Bible was one brother killing another because he

was jealous over an offering! That spirit passed down to his children, because later Lamech murdered a man. The bloodline of Cain carried two serious weaknesses: the spirit of jealousy and the spirit of murder.

The descendants of Cain produced the first musical instruments and were leaders in arts and music. Knowing that, we must guard against these two spirits in the church, especially in the music department. Most pastors will admit that the singers and musicians are some of the most difficult people to deal with because they are jealous and competitive. Jentezen Franklin once said that he was going to write a book and title it, "When Satan fell from heaven, he landed in my choir." That spirit seen in Cain is still slaying those who are offering sacrifices of praise and worship. This time it is not with a club, but with a tongue.

Every church that is enlarging its borders is an open target for criticism from others that are not growing. The most effective way to attack someone is to cut that person apart with the tongue. The assumption is that, if you say enough bad things, you won't have to worry about your members attending that other church across town.

Let's make this clear. *Satan does not need to send a prince spirit with a big sword to destroy, as long as he can find a Christian with a big mouth who knows how to cut a person apart with their words.*

THE DEVIL WILL TURN ON YOU

Years ago while preparing a study on the occult, I located an interesting piece of information. An occult leader from

Knoxville, Tennessee was offering a challenge to young people through a printed piece of mail. He shared his own personal experiences related to the dark side and boldly proclaimed that he could move spirits to work on his behalf. He promised similar results to those who would follow his instructions. But the promise of power came with a price. He said, "If you do not totally allow these spirits to take control of you, they will turn on you and cause you great damage and possibly death."

There it was, stated clearly in black and white. Satan's only condition was, give me all you have or I'll destroy you.

Those in the church who spend their time as busybodies and consume precious prayer time speaking lies in hypocrisy and spreading gossip might not realize that they are taking the devil to dinner. Eventually they will pay a high price for entertaining the enemy.

Jesus made this clear in Matthew 18:21-35, in the parable of the unforgiving servant. One man owed the king ten thousand talents. This was an enormous sum of money that the man could not repay, so he pleaded with the king for mercy. The good-hearted king was moved with compassion and forgave the entire debt.

But the servant then went out and found a fellow servant who owed him only a hundred denarii, which was a mere fraction of the ten thousand talents he had been forgiven. When the servant pleaded for mercy and time to repay, the forgiven servant had the man thrown in prison. When the king heard about it, he arrested the forgiven servant, placed him in prison, and delivered him to the torturers because he would not have compassion on his fellow servant and forgive his debt.

Jesus warned, “So shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if you do not forgive everyone his brother’s trespasses.” Jesus warns that He will allow the tormentor to move into your life if you walk in unforgiveness!

That is exactly what happened at the church at Corinth. A young man was committing fornication with his stepmother, and Paul rebuked him and commanded that the young man be turned over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Later in 2 Timothy 2:25-26, Paul told the young pastor to correct, in humility, those who are in opposition, so that God perhaps will grant them repentance that they may know the truth, come to their senses, and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Strife is food that feeds evil spirits. In 1 Samuel 17, King Saul became jealous of a teenaged shepherd boy, David, who slew a giant. As Saul began to eye David, he also began to set him up to be killed by the Philistines. These secret strategies of Saul were soon made known and the spirit world moved into operation. Eventually Saul was troubled by an evil spirit. God permitted his mind to be turned over to a tormenting demon that finally drove the king to fall upon his own sword in battle.

No doubt there are many people who sit in church each week, tormented in their minds by evil spirits. Unforgiveness is one sin that opens a door to the enemy, but Jesus reveals other dangers to your spiritual walk with God:

1. If you do not forgive others, then the Lord does not accept your offerings (Matt. 5:23-26).
2. If you do not forgive others, then God will not forgive

you (Matt. 6:14-15).

3. If you do not forgive others, you can be turned over to a tormenting spirit (Matt. 18:34-35).

Consider this. If we walk in unforgiveness and God does not hear our prayers, then Satan is not obligated to obey our warfare. I can yell, “Satan, I rebuke you, I bind you, I come against you, I cast you down,” and the prayer is nothing but empty words. If God is under no covenant obligation to hear the prayers of an unforgiving person, then what makes us believe that Satan is under spiritual obligation to obey our commands to depart?

In order for Satan to flee from us, we are to submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7). Resisting the devil also means to resist the bitterness, strife and unforgiveness that he is attempting to impose upon your heart and mind.

Jesus gave His disciples power over all demons and disease according to Luke 10:19. But in Mark 9, they encountered a boy having a seizure, and the demon was so stubborn, it would not come out of the boy. Jesus came off the mountain, spoke the Word, and the evil spirit left the boy’s body with great force. The disciples questioned why they were unable to cast out the evil spirit. Jesus had already said that all things are possible to him who believes. But the root in this situation might have been more than unbelief.

Prior to this event, the disciples had been in a discussion about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. They had been rebuking people who were not in their inner circle, but who were casting out demons. There was a lot of strife among

the twelve, just prior to this demonic encounter. At other times they cast out devils and were rejoicing (Luke 10:17); but this time, something was different. Something had changed within their spirits, and the evil spirit was not listening to their rebukes.

After thirty-five years of full time ministry, I am convinced that many ministers are defeating themselves through jealousy of other ministers. This King Saul syndrome has them bound in the palace, plotting how they can damage that young preacher across town who has received a fresh anointing. Saul was more concerned about the opinions of the people than he was about the favor of God. On one occasion he said to Samuel, "Make me look good in the eyes of the people."

HOW TO OVERCOME SATAN'S ACCUSATIONS

There are two major challenges a Believer will encounter: dealing with the guilt of yesterday and defeating the fear of tomorrow. Guilt brings condemnation and fear brings torment. Both condemnation and fear can cause a Believer to live in a condition of mental torment.

The good news is that we have an advocate on earth and an advocate in heaven. One takes care of the past and the other handles the details of tomorrow!

Christ ascended into the heavens and today is seated at the right hand of God. He is called our Advocate: *"My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father; Jesus*

Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

The Greek word advocate means “one who represents another in a court of law.” The throne room of God in heaven is set up as a court. There is a judge (God), a prosecutor to accuse (Satan), and twenty-four elders who serve as the jury. The angels serve as the witnesses.

Satan’s present position is as a prosecutor before God—an accuser of the brethren. When he hurls slanderous accusations toward us, stating that he has proof we sinned because a team of demons were present when it happened, there is nothing Satan can do once you have confessed your guilt, repented, and been covered by the blood of Jesus. The sin is removed as though it never happened! Jesus is in heaven taking care of your past, and making sure it is erased by His blood.

When David was transferring the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem, he stopped every six paces and offered a blood offering. Some estimate he sacrificed over 3,500 offerings before God. From heaven’s viewpoint, there was a continuous trail of blood from the house of Obed-Edom to the gates of Jerusalem. David knew the past had to be covered by the blood.

Jesus is dealing with our past, but who is setting the plans for the future? The answer is the other Comforter. Jesus announced that He would go away but would send another Comforter to abide with you forever. This Spirit of truth was the Holy Spirit, who would also show you things to come:

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter; that he may abide with you

forever.”

– JOHN 14:16

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you.”

– JOHN 14:26

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will shew you things to come.”

– JOHN 16:13

“Things to come” speaks of the future. Often we receive reports concerning the future that might seem bleak and depressing. Perhaps you have been told that you have cancer, or that your job is going to end in three months. Bills are coming due and there is no money to pay them. That is when the Holy Spirit comforts you and brings you the good news that Christ is still in control.

Years ago, Pastor Gary Sears of Mount Olive Ministries in Cleveland, Tennessee was in a state of depression. Things were not going well and he was weary in well-doing. He told his wife that he was thinking of resigning the church the following Sunday.

A short time later, he received a call from a prayer intercessor in the church who said, “I have been praying for you this morning, and my husband and I need to speak to you

today.” Pastor told them to come on over.

When they arrived the woman said, “The Lord told me that you were considering resigning the church. He sent me to tell you that He has already been in your future and things look good.”

With that, the pastor began rejoicing, remained at the church, and is still there to this day, pastoring a church that is filled each Sunday.

Years ago the Holy Spirit dropped these words into my spirit: “Some of God’s children are acting like they are an orphan without a father. Tell them to quit acting like an orphan.” He reminded me of the Scripture, “I will not leave you comfortless.” Some translate this as, “I will not leave you an orphan.”

Jesus is in heaven dealing with your past, and the Holy Spirit is on earth taking care of your future. The only damage you can bring is that which you create for yourself through acts of disobedience.

CHAPTER 9

People Who Won't Attend Church

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD. And the people did yet corruptly.”

— 2 CHRONICLES 27:2

SHE HAD THE appearance of a classic grandmother. She was petite with silver hair, and she reminded me of the little woman who has lived in the same house since she gave birth to her first child, and sits in the porch swing every evening and prays. She came forward in a church service and asked for prayer for her children. What she said has stayed with me to this day.

“Brother Stone, I want you to help me pray for my children. I raised them in church but they have drifted away from God and will no longer attend,” she said.

I asked her how many children she had, and she replied, “I have seven children who all have children, and none of them are in church.”

Something didn't seem right. She was the epitome of a pure-hearted woman who loved the Lord with all her heart. How could her seven children have been raised in church and none interested in coming to the house of God? Out of curiosity I asked her, "Why do you think they will not come to church?"

She looked at the ground and then back at me. "I know exactly why they won't come to church. When they were growing up, I was very strict. I would not let them do any activity except attend church. I restricted how they looked and the way they dressed. I thought that was holiness. When they left home, they were glad to be out from under my bondage, and they will no longer come to church."

I had heard this same story for years. Being raised in a very conservative denomination, I heard young people in the church say, "When I leave home, I'm doing what I want to do and nobody is going to stop me." But it was this woman's next statement that I have never forgotten: "I taught them what not to do, but I never taught them how to love Jesus. If I had taught them to fall in love with Jesus, they would love to come to church."

Driving back to the hotel I began to think, "I was raised in the same denomination that also had certain practical teaching. Yet I loved church. I always wanted to attend and loved to hear Dad preach. Why was I not offended or in spiritual rebellion? As I reminisced I began to realize that my father, although a man who believed in holy living, had always preached the Word and had such a walk with God that we were fascinated at how the Lord talked to him and revealed things that were going to happen long before they happened. On several occasions we had seen people healed and others delivered from evil

spirits that had them bound.

The difference was this: I learned to love Jesus. Those who love Jesus want to be in His presence. They want to surround themselves with the Lord's family at church. They want to be obedient.

THE MAN WHO LOVED GOD BUT DIDN'T GO TO CHURCH

We assume that a person who loves the Lord will automatically attend the house of God. But that is not always the case. Occasionally I meet people who truly love Jesus but have been hurt by a bad experience in the church. This negative experience has caused them to put up a wall for fear of being hurt. Such an example is found in Scripture.

He was a man who loved God, but didn't go to church. His father was King Uzziah, one of Judah's greatest kings who ruled for fifty-two years. Uzziah was personal friends with two of Israel's most noted prophets—Isaiah and Zechariah. His mother was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok. According to Scripture, she was the daughter of a priest, for Zadok and his sons were the priests in David's time (2 Chronicles 27:1-2).

Who was this man? His name was Jotham. Imagine Jotham as a young child, sitting at the palace table and listening to the prophet Zechariah describe a vision of the Lord returning to Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives splitting in half (Zechariah 14:1-4). Picture him as a child overhearing conversations between his father and the prophet Isaiah concerning the future of Israel.

With such a family legacy, surely Jotham would follow in the footsteps of his father and mother. We read that he did what was right in the eyes of God, but he *entered not into the house of the Lord* (the Temple). What would cause Jotham to avoid the House of his God?

Just as many today, Jotham had a bad experience with the House of God. I believe it was strange circumstances surrounding his father's illness and death that caused Jotham to avoid the Temple.

On one occasion, his father Uzziah entered into the holy place and offered incense on the altar. The offering of incense was reserved only for the priest, and Uzziah was a king. After being rebuked by the High Priest for his error, Uzziah became angry at the golden altar and immediately he was stricken with leprosy. He left the Temple covered with white sores. As a leper, he was required by law to separate himself from his family and friends: *"And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land"* (2 Chronicles 26:21).

If I had been Jotham, the first question in my mind would have been, "How could the Lord allow my father to become a leper when he has been faithful to God for fifty-two years?"

Jotham chose to love God but avoid the Temple. He may have said (as some today), I can serve God at home. The Lord is the same everywhere. It just is not necessary that I go to church.

In the past, the righteous kings of Israel and Judah would

celebrate the feasts and attend the Temple during special celebrations and seasons. But Jotham “entered not into the Temple of the Lord.”

Jotham was not thinking about his son who would one day become king. This little boy named Ahaz would come to the throne at age twenty. Ahaz would become one of the most corrupt kings in Jerusalem’s history. He made molded images for baals, burned incense to idols on the high mountains, and offered children in the fires of molech, the dreadful Canaanite god whose iron belly was hot with fire.

Jotham’s lack of interest in the house of God spread to his sons. This is the picture the enemy never shows a Believer who has been offended by a pastor or someone in a church. Have you ever driven a car or sat at a dinner table with your children and begun to complain about something in your church? People do this and then wonder why their family members won’t attend church.

By not going to the Temple of God (church), Jotham failed to understand that he was setting a bad example for his son, a future king. If dad isn’t interested in church, why should the son be excited about the place? Yes, Jotham loved God, but “the people did corruptly” (2 Chronicles 27:2). As the leader goes, so go the people. As the father goes, so go the children.

He loved God, but didn’t go to church. His offense cost him the spiritual legacy that his father Uzziah began.

I HAVE SEEN BOTH SIDES

Being raised in a minister’s home and having traveled for over

thirty-five years, I have witnessed both sides—the side that was raised under strict conditions and never taught to love Jesus, as well as the side where people no longer attend the house of God because of offense. My personal observation is that most children of Christian parents who refuse to enter the house of God do so for one or both of these reasons.

A person can love God and not attend church, but a person cannot please God and not attend church. By church, I am not speaking of the physical building, but the place where Believers of like faith assemble to learn the Word of God, worship, and pray. Hebrews 10:25 tells us, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

Christ loved the church as a man should love his wife: *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”* (Ephesians 5:25). Would a man marry a woman and live in a separate house? Would he tell her, “I love you,” and never desire to spend quality time in her presence? What would you think of the husband who never sent his wife flowers, never gave her a gift, never honored her birthday or anniversary, and never took her out to eat? A man who doesn’t honor his wife would not have the respect of his family.

If we love God, we will love God’s people and we will love God’s house. If you are searching for a perfect church, then please understand that there are no perfect people, so after you join, it will no longer be a perfect church!

Perhaps you have been hurt or offended by a pastor or someone at church; or perhaps you were raised in a legalistic

environment and decided you would do your own thing after you left home. Do not allow the enemy to use these or any other reasons to keep you away from the house of God. Consider the children you are raising who need to be in the house of God where they can learn His Word and spend time with other Believers. Do not forsake assembling together with other Believers!

Many years ago I was ministering in Adamsville, Alabama when, on Saturday night, the Holy Spirit gave me a word to minister on Sunday morning. The subject was, "I don't want to be a Christian." I shared stories of how so-called Christians are often the hindrance to sinners being converted, as the sinner sees no change in the life of the person who claims to be a Christian. Thus, the sinner has no desire to serve the Christian's God.

Present in the service that morning was a man who had stated to his family that he was not interested in becoming a Christian because he partied with church folks on the weekend and they were hypocrites. That morning, the Spirit of God touched his heart and he repented. Over twenty-six years has passed, and he has led hundreds to the Lord and never looked back.

In these last days, the enemy will attempt to keep you away from a good, local church. However, you have the responsibility to raise your children in a congregation where they can discover their destiny. Remember that Jotham's decision to avoid church affected his children, who completely turned away from God. Don't let this happen to you!

CHAPTER 10

DISCERNING CONFLICT AND DEALING WITH THE ENEMY

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

– 2 CORINTHIANS 2:11

A CLOSE FRIEND of mine attended four years of Bible college and began to pastor his first church with fifteen members. After preaching his first revival he said, “In three months I had to unlearn most of what I was taught in school. It worked in the book but not in real life.”

I have read instructional books on how to deal with certain conflicts. Some instruction is effective and some is not. But the Bible gives you battle instructions that have been proven through nearly six-thousand years of history.

Experience is also a great teacher. Personal testimonies are victories won through experience, and those who have been on the front lines can help those who are headed to the front line. After growing up in a minister’s home and spending thirty-five

years in personal ministry, I have seen or experienced nearly every type of conflict. In this chapter I will outline some instructions for discerning conflict and dealing with the enemy. These nuggets come from both Scripture and personal experience.

DISCERNING THE CONFLICT

In 1 Corinthians 12:10, when the Apostle Paul wrote about the gifts of the Spirit, we read, *“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.”*

My father once said that, before a Believer asks the Lord to use them in any of the nine gifts of the Spirit, they should first pray for wisdom. Operating in a spiritual gift without wisdom is like giving a fourteen-year-old a car and telling them to drive without ever giving them any training. Sooner or later, the untrained driver and the unwise person will cause a wreck.

Likewise, when a Believer enters the arena of the spirit world, they first need to pray for the ability to discern the spirits. Here is the reason. Not every negative circumstance, bad situation, or spiritual battle is caused by a spirit. Discernment is necessary to remain balanced.

DISCERNING WHAT?

Paul spoke of discerning of spirits. The word spirits is plural, because three realms of discernment are necessary: discerning the spirit of God; discerning the spirit of man; and discerning

the spirit of Satan.

“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”

– 1 CORINTHIANS 2:11-12

Some Christians will attend a church service and say, “Did you see that? I know that was not of God!” Often they are not discerning the spirits, but instead are giving their own opinion. What they saw might have contradicted their religious traditions, and therefore they are convinced it cannot be from God. One man said, “That revival across town is not of God.” I asked him how he knew this. He replied, “If it were of God, it would have started in our church!”

That is not discernment. That is ignorance. Discerning the things of the Spirit of God means being able to hear and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit and separate His voice from your own voice.

I try to make this distinction when I minister. The times that I know without a doubt that I am hearing from the Holy Spirit I will say, “The Lord has directed me to do this.” If I simply feel something in my own spirit, I make the distinction by saying, “I feel in my spirit we should do this.” God should never have to take the blame when someone mistakes their own zeal for a word from God.

We must be able to discern the spirit of man. This refers to the ability to discern a person's true motives, and to see into the hearts of those with whom we surround ourselves. Women have married outside of God's will because they did not take the time to discern the spirits and listen to what the Lord was saying about the inner heart of the man to whom they were engaged. Sometimes people don't want to hear because they are afraid they will receive a word from God they won't like.

Finally, we must discern the presence of Satan and evil. There is a danger of people blaming everything on an evil spirit. If the tire on the car goes flat, the devil did it. Suddenly Satan is in the tire business. If the dinner burns on the stove, it was the devil trying to burn the house down. These excesses bring more attention to the enemy than to God and His kingdom.

DISCERNING DEMONIC POSSESSION

One of the areas where great caution must be exercised is in the area of demonic possession. For a person to be possessed, an evil spirit takes control of the person's spirit, mind and body. Such an example is recorded in Scripture:

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

“And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because

that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

“And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

“But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

“For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.”

– MARK 5:1-8

This tormented man was possessed by about two thousand unclean spirits. Here were the signs of demonic control:

1. The man was tormented in his mind.
2. The man was dwelling among dead things (the tombs).
3. The man was cutting himself (attempting to harm himself or take his own life).
4. The man had supernatural strength to break iron chains and wooden fetters.
5. The man could not be tamed, or brought under control.

6. The man was naked (verse 15).
7. The man was continually screaming in torment.
8. The enemy spoke through him, using the man's voice.

Today this man would have been placed in a mental hospital, given heavy medication, and guarded for a suicide watch. His physical actions of screaming, cutting himself, staying up day and night, having supernatural strength, and being unable to rest were signs of another force living on the inside of his body. Jesus knew that this man was possessed by strong spirits, and he asked, "What is your name?"

The demon called itself legion. In Christ's day, a Roman legion was six thousand foot soldiers. There were up to two thousand spirits in this man; therefore, the demon took the name of legion, or "many" (Mark 5:9).

Those who think they might be dealing with demonic possession are often dealing with someone who is either oppressed or vexed by a spirit, rather than demonic possession. Years ago in a revival I saw a crowd gathering over a young girl. She was crying and screaming as the people were attempting to cast a spirit out of her. I entered the circle and discerned that something was wrong, so I told the folks to back away from her.

I whispered in her ear and said, "Are you a Christian?" She replied, "Yes."

I asked what she was doing, and she said that the people praying for her told her that she has a demon.

"Do you?" I asked.

“No. I’m crying because I’m afraid and they think a spirit is tormenting me.”

I told her to stand up and begin to praise the Lord. She did. The others looked puzzled.

Discernment enables a person to detect the source behind the conflict. A strong spiritual struggle can be the result of three things:

1. Self-invited conflict created by our own actions or bad decisions;
2. Uninvited conflict created by people who work in opposition; or
3. Hindering spirits that capitalize upon bad decisions or opposition.

There is willful sinning, presumptuous disobedience, and ignorant disobedience. We sin willfully when we know to do the right thing and we sin anyway, thinking we will just ask forgiveness after we have sinned. This is choosing to sin. Willful sinning is a form of rebellion and it will open the door to the enemy.

Presumptuous disobedience is when you know that God has not put it in your heart to do something and you do it anyhow, thinking that God will be forced to bless your decision. This also opens the door to the enemy.

Ignorant disobedience and sin is often seen with new converts who have no previous knowledge of Scripture. They do things they shouldn’t be doing because they don’t know

any better. These people need to be taught through discipleship by mature Believers. God is merciful to those who simply do not know better, because where little is known, little will be required. Where much is known, much will be required. However, ignorance is not to be used as an excuse to live in sin and rebellion. People need to learn God's Word and obedience must become a lifestyle.

When you make a bad decision, don't blame the devil for your decision or for the consequences of your actions. Be thankful when you made the right choices and admit it when you didn't.

THINGS I HAVE LEARNED

The Christian life is meant to be a life of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). It is a race that will award a prize to those who can lay aside sin and weights, and run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). In this walk we will also experience conflict, and we must be knowledgeable and prepared for battle. Here are things I have learned.

1. YOU WILL HAVE OPPOSITION.

As long as you live, you will have spiritual conflict. The enemy knows that God has a sovereign plan for your life, so he will work through people to throw you off course, distract you, and cause you to fail at your assignment.

It is a fact that not everybody is going to like you. You can do everything in your power to be accepted, but someone's personality is going to cross with yours. Perhaps a co-worker

will become jealous of your progress, and a jealous fellow employee can make life miserable for you. King Saul was jealous of David, and even attempted to pin him to a wall with a javelin. David escaped, but the jealousy opened a door for an evil spirit to attack and torment King Saul. His only relief came when David played a harp in the palace.

It is possible to encounter a spirit through someone who opposes you. Again, this takes discernment to determine if it is simply the flesh or something more severe.

The enemy will use both carnal people and certain circumstances as an opening to work against you. The Apostle Paul with his thorn in the flesh was a powerful example. The war is a test of your faith and your ability to fulfill the will of God. *The manner in which you respond to the attacks will determine the outcome of every spiritual conflict that you encounter.*

2. CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS CAREFULLY.

Use caution with whom you associate. Your closest friends should be trustworthy people in whom you have confidence. They should not be people who gossip and tell everything they know. Any person who betrays you and talks about you behind your back should not be part of your inner circle of close friends.

People might start out as your friend and then turn on you later. When this happens, it will affect your life. Understand that it is possible to be friendly to people without confiding in them and choosing them as close friends.

For some people, sowing discord seems to come naturally. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that God hates; in fact, they are called an abomination: pride, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among the brethren.

Discord is one way that the enemy gets into the church. Romans 16:17 says to avoid those among you who cause division and offense. Christians who cause division among other Christians and in local congregations are using their mouths to cause offense, division, and discord. When people get offended, they listen to falsehoods. When they are offended, they listen to any lies against a person. Their love turns cold. Have no fellowship with people who cause division and sow discord.

3. THE ENEMY WANTS TO DESTROY YOUR INFLUENCE.

People think they can willfully commit any sin they want and ask forgiveness later; but they forget about all the people whom they influence. Family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even your enemies are watching you. When they conclude that you are a hypocrite or a person who cannot or will not live a life of right-standing before God, you will lose your influence.

Every person has at least seven people whom they can personally influence. If you can reach your seven for Christ, and each of those can reach their seven and so on, the number of people who are reached for Christ will grow exponentially. If the enemy can destroy your influence, he can keep these

people at a distance from Christ.

Some people can influence more than seven. The more people you can influence for the Kingdom of God, the greater threat you are to the kingdom of darkness. Look at Job; perhaps you have never noticed how influential he was.

Not only was Job a righteous, upright, wealthy and God-fearing man, he was influential in his community. In Job chapter 29, we read that when he went to the gate of the city and took his seat in the open square, the young men hid, the old men arose and stood, the princes refrained from talking, and the nobles were hushed. Job delivered the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the lame, the blind, and the one who had no helper. He wore righteousness and justice like clothing. He was a benevolent man who was upright in all his doings. When the enemy attacked him, surely he thought Job's influence and ability to help the less fortunate was over. But in the end, God restored to him a double portion.

4. THE ENEMY WILL CUSTOMIZE ATTACKS AGAINST YOU.

Each person has specific weaknesses, and the enemy knows your weaknesses. He looks at your personality, your weaknesses of the flesh, and your verbal confessions. People fight different kinds of battles with their weaknesses.

Perhaps you are withdrawn and introverted. The enemy will battle your mind with self-esteem issues and depression. If you are outgoing, the enemy will connect you with the wrong crowd. God will use your personality for His purposes, and that

is why He created you as He did. But the enemy will also attack you according to your type of personality.

The enemy will work against your flesh. Galatians 5:19-21 lists the works of the flesh as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like. The list ends with these words: Those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The words that you speak are also important, because your fears and weaknesses are often revealed by what you speak. Life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). Sometimes we take too lightly the words we speak. We say things and don't pay attention to what we are saying. The spirit realm is like the legal system—the words that you speak can and will be used against you. If you speak that your child is worthless and will not amount to anything, or if you speak that you will probably die of a certain disease and so forth, the enemy will use those words against you.

Learn when to speak and when to be quiet. If you speak the truth found in the Word of God, you cannot go wrong. Let the fruit of the Spirit operate in your life—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

5. NOT EVERY ATTACK IS CAUSED BY AN EVIL SPIRIT.

Sometimes Christians can become demon chasers, thinking that

everything bad that happens is caused by an evil spirit. If they get a cold, if they sneeze, if the heating unit fails in their house, or if the lights go out in a storm, they believe it was caused by a demon. Friend, the enemy has more to do than play with the light switch and attack the heater in your house.

This is where we need true spiritual discernment to detect the attacks of the enemy. Some attacks can be caused by a hindering spirit, but many are simply the result of our flesh or unwise decisions. Many personal choices and decisions have later come back to bite the person who made the wrong choice or decision.

James 1:5 says that, if you lack wisdom, ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given. Ask God to give you wisdom and emotional maturity to make the right choices and decisions.

6. DON'T EXALT SATAN'S ATTACKS BEYOND GOD'S ABILITY TO DELIVER.

Don't make Satan bigger than God, darkness greater than light, and evil greater than good. Satan does not have more power; he simply has lots of experience. He is a seasoned warrior, having convinced a third of the angels of God to follow him (Revelation 12:4). His kingdom is united in opposition to the Kingdom of God.

Yet too often, Christians see this conflict as God and Satan on the opposite ends of a tug of war, with both pulling at full strength. At times God gains the advantage, while other times Satan wins. Here is the view given in the Bible: *"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them*

openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

The show was over at the resurrection. Jesus defeated Satan at the cross and triumphed over him at the resurrection. All of your battles can end in victory. For a Believer, even death has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55).

One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is to magnify—that is enlarge—the ability of God in your sight. In Acts chapter 10, the Bible says that when Cornelius and his family were filled with the Holy Spirit, they “heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). Praying in your prayer language of the Holy Spirit magnifies God’s ability in the eyes of your spirit. Satan cannot compare to God, and he never will.

7. FUTURE CONFLICTS ARE NOTHING TO FEAR.

Christians have preconceived ideas based on the battle experiences of others. One such idea is, “I must be careful getting too close to God because the closer I get to God, the greater the battle with the enemy.” Others believe that if they dig deeper into the Word, more conflict will follow.

Some have been healed, yet are reluctant to testify because they fear the sickness will come back upon them and the enemy will cause them more trouble. These fears are often based upon someone’s negative experience instead of the promises of God.

Those who make it through one storm can become overly cautious of future storms. But look at the people in the Bible. Daniel was not afraid that a prayer meeting would always lead him to the lion’s den. The three Hebrew children never had a

fiery furnace ministry. They experienced the furnace of fire one time. During the six-month attack I experienced at age eighteen, I began to believe this would go on for the rest of my life. The enemy is a deceiver and a liar (John 8:44). No conflict lasts forever.

The Scripture says that we overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11). If we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). When Christ defeated Satan on the mountain of temptation, He resisted Satan by quoting the Word (Matthew 4:1-10).

We should never fear the conflict, and neither should fear of trouble cause us to exaggerate the ability of the enemy.

8. DON'T ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN WHY A BATTLE HAS COME.

When Job lost his family, his possessions and his health, three close friends came to help him mourn his losses. Instead of praying with Job, they each presented their case for why they thought the trouble came. One confessed that Job needed to be humbled. Another felt that Job was filled with pride, and the attack was a result of Job's arrogance. Still another friend assumed that Job was bound by some hidden sin that God was exposing through his sufferings.

In the end all three friends were wrong. God rebuked them: *"And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have*

not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath” (Job 42:7).

Once Job’s trial was reversed and he received a double blessing, the writer of Job realized that Satan had set a target against Job. It was not a result of Job’s sin, pride or ego, but simply a trial of his faith (1 Peter 1:7).

Wasted energy can be spent asking why and what if questions when a battle breaks out. Concentrate instead on the seasons of refreshing and the way of escape.

We are in a spiritual, supernatural conflict whose end results determine the eternal destinies of humanity. If you are going to obey God, expect nothing more than a battle and nothing less than a victory.

9. CAST DOWN WRONG THOUGHTS THE ENEMY IS PLANTING IN YOUR MIND.

The adversary operates in the realm of thoughts, which take on the form of fiery darts of the enemy. You must immediately resist the stinking thinking that often accompanies hindrances and opposition. When wrong imaginations enter your mind, immediately cast them down before they begin to build a stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Bible says in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing our minds: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

To receive the most benefit, this should be a daily renewal.

Psalm 1:1-3 tells us, *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”*

By daily meditating upon Scripture and renewing the mind, we can use the Word of God to counter the enemy's darts of unbelief, doubt, fear, unforgiveness, negative words that have been spoken over our lives, and so forth. We cannot allow those kinds of negative thoughts to enter the zone of our imagination.

Years ago Dr. Paul Meier conducted a study on students at an evangelical university and found that those who read and meditated upon Scripture every day and had done so for three years or longer were significantly healthier and happier than those in the other control groups. The ones who renewed their minds daily with the Word suffered less anxiety, depression, and bitterness; and they had more joy, peace, and emotional maturity.

Get in the Word until the Word gets in you. Cast down evil imaginations. Philippians 4:8 reads, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”*

You can't always keep the enemy from knocking on your

door, but you can keep him from coming through the door!

10. MAKE SURE YOUR BELIEF LEVEL EXCEEDS THAT OF THE ENEMY'S.

The devil often has more belief than some Christians. Satan believes there is a God (James 2:19), that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 5:7), that hell exists (Luke 8:31), that his time is short (Revelation 12:12), and that Jesus will one day return (Revelation 22:12). Satan “believes,” but he is lost. Some Christians deny the existence of demons, deny the existence of hell, and deny the return of Christ. It is sad when demons believe more of the Scripture than some Christians!

Don't allow the enemy to out-believe you. He believes you will not make it. He believes you will fall and not get up. He believes he can make you sick and you will never recover. Don't believe him! Your faith in God and your belief in the work of Jesus on your behalf will overcome your belief in the attacks of the enemy.

Years ago people were praying for a woman who was suffering with cancer. The healing breakthrough never came and the prayer seemed hindered. The Holy Spirit impressed me that the woman had exalted the name of the disease (cancer) above the name of Jesus. According to Philippians 2:10, the name of Jesus has been exalted above every other name in the eyes of God, but that is not always so in the eyes of people. If your faith in the name of a disease is greater than your faith in the name of Jesus, then the disease will win the battle. Never let the enemy's belief level exceed your own.

11. SATAN'S KINGDOM CAN INITIATE AN ATTACK, BUT CANNOT DETERMINE THE OUTCOME.

This is an important fact. God never reveals to the enemy the final outcome of your conflict. The adversary can plan and present an attack against you, but he cannot determine your response, nor can he control when or how the Lord is going to bring you out.

I have also discovered the power that is multiplied when two or three agree. The strongest battles against demonic powers in my life began early in my ministry. I saw a tremendous change after I married Pam. I believe the reason is found in the following scriptures:

“And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

—ECCLESIASTES 4:12

“How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?”

—DEUTERONOMY 32:30

Pam and I had entered a marriage covenant. We were two people who had become one flesh and one spirit. The level of our spiritual authority was multiplied ten times after we were married. That multiplication gave us more authority over the powers of the enemy, because instead of one praying, there were two. Instead of one fasting, there were two. Jesus sent

His disciples forth two by two, because “two shall withstand him” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Even if you are not married or your spouse is not a Believer, find other Believers who will pray with you and stand with you in the battle, and this principle will work for you as well.

12. REMAIN FULLY CLOTHED IN THE ARMOR OF GOD AND USE YOUR SPIRITUAL WEAPONS.

While serving time in prison, the Apostle Paul noticed the uniforms of the prison guards and compared them to the armor of God (Ephesians 6:12-18). That armor consists of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and praying in the Spirit. These seven together will help us stand our ground and resist the adversary and his evil forces.

These are offensive weapons; don't wait and pull them out of storage after you are in the midst of a battle. Wear them at all times in preparation for battle.

Praying in the Spirit is important when you are engaged in a conflict. The Holy Spirit will warn you of things the enemy is planning. He will show you things to come. When you are burdened, you should stop and pray. Pay attention when the Lord gives you a warning. Quiet your mind and listen to His voice. If you listen and pray in the Spirit, you are giving God the opportunity to rise up, pray through you, speak to your spirit, and work on your behalf. The enemy has his assignments, but God is a party crasher. He will send His angels to work on His assignments and to protect you and

defeat the enemy. You just need to seek His face.

The name and the blood of Jesus are also powerful weapons. The name of Jesus has so much authority that, whatever you ask in His name, He will do it so the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13). Through His name we receive salvation, healing, and deliverance.

The blood of Jesus is powerful enough to blot out our sins as though they never existed. His blood redeems us, justifies us, cleanses us, protects us, heals us, allows us to overcome, and gives us eternal life! Never ignore the power and authority given to us through the name and the blood of Jesus.

Do not neglect the power of God's Word. Scripture, when spoken out of our mouth, becomes a two-edged sword. That is yet another powerful weapon of warfare. Remember what the Lord said to me during my first battle with a hindering spirit: "Son, as long as you live, Satan will use what you see and what you hear against you. It is time that you stand on the only thing that can never be shaken or changed. Stand upon my Word!"

It is imperative that we stop looking at our circumstances and begin to stand upon God's Word and His promises. Circumstances around us will change; but His Word is the one and only thing that will never change!

CHAPTER 11

REVIVING FROM SPIRITUAL BATTLES

I ONCE HEARD AN older man say, “If I’d known I would have lived this long, I would have taken better care of myself!” Occasionally I’ll see someone over the age of seventy who is wearing a hat that reads, “Genuine Antique.” It’s great when Believers can take aging with such humor. As the months turn into years and the years into decades, we realize that genuine antiques are not just found at a furniture auction. The value of an antique is found in its age and its quality, and it maintains its value if the owner takes care of it. As we age, we need to learn to take better care of the “antique” that’s reflected in the mirror.

An Israeli researcher told me that, in the time of Christ, the average man lived about forty-five years. Early death was more common due to wars, violent rebellions, fatal diseases, pestilences, and other problems that cut the lifespan of the people to half of the expected seventy or eighty years that is promised by the psalmist (Psalm 90:10). Today, people live longer, retire later, and understand the need to continually renew their body, soul and spirit. However, the spiritual battles

are wearing people out, affecting their bodies, and undermining the foundation of their emotions.

The emotions that follow long personal struggles play on the mind, often whispering into the conscience of a Believer, telling them that their days are numbered and their departure to heaven is at hand. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the early patriarchs of the faith, all experienced a unique season in their lives when it appeared that their time to depart this earth had arrived, and they were making final preparations. However, a particular event occurred which motivated and recharged them to get back up and live a little longer.

ABRAHAM WENT FROM BED TO BETROTHAL

Abraham was old and stricken in age (Gen. 24:1). His beloved wife Sarah had died, and his son Isaac was about thirty-seven to thirty-eight years of age and still unmarried. It was time for Isaac to find his wife and begin to bring some children into the world. As he lay on his bed, Abraham called his servant to him saying, “Place your hand under my thigh and make an agreement with me that you will find a bride for my son” (Genesis 24:1-3). Three times Abraham warned his servant not to take Isaac back to the land (of Syria) to meet the future bride (Genesis 24:4, 6, 8). No doubt Abraham feared that if Isaac departed to another country, he would settle outside of the Promised Land and never fulfilled God’s covenant plan for the family.

Immediately Abraham’s servant loaded a ten-camel caravan with gold, silver and the wealth of Abraham, and trekked

toward Syria. Upon arriving at his destination he met a young woman, Rebekah, who was drawing water at the family well. This woman would become the wife of Abraham's son Isaac, and after an official invitation and offering of gifts, she was carried back to the Promised Land to meet Isaac. Upon seeing Rebekah, the Bible says that Isaac took her into his mother's tent, she became his wife, and he was comforted after Sarah's death (Genesis 24:67).

Isaac was not the only one who was comforted. Something got ahold of old father Abraham. Isaac's marriage must have stirred his aged father, as Abraham got up from his bed and remarried a woman named Keturah. Through her Abraham fathered six other sons. Abraham would have been nearly 140 years of age, and Keturah would have been much younger.

Abraham was lying on a bed, stricken with age, when he sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. But he lived another thirty-five years, eventually passing away at age 175 (Genesis 25:7). Through Keturah, Abraham fathered six more sons, seven grandsons, and three great-grandsons (Genesis 25:2-4).

What triggered the revitalization of Abraham in his old age? I suggest that Abraham lived past age seventy-five because of the expectation of a future son who would begin a new nation. It is possible that, after Isaac's marriage, Abraham revived to stay around and see the early stages of God's promises being fulfilled.

ISAAC WENT FROM BAD TO BETTER

Many years later, a similar reinvigoration occurred with Isaac, when he was in his senior years. In Genesis 27, Isaac was also

lying on his bed. His eyesight was becoming dim and he was unsure of when he might die (see Genesis 27:1-3). He called Esau to his bedside and requested that he take a hunting trip and prepare a meal of his favorite venison soup, and afterwards he would give Esau the patriarch's blessing (which is normally given at the time of death—see Genesis 49).

Esau departed that morning on assignment from his dad. Esau's mom, Rebekah, saw an opportunity of a lifetime for her other son Jacob. While Esau was hunting, she cooked the requested meal and gave it to Jacob, who covered his arms with goat's hair, fed his father, and in return asked his father to bless him. The trick worked; Isaac was fooled by the goat's hair. He felt the goatskin-covered arms of Isaac and thought he was Esau.

When Esau returned, he realized he had been duped, and a family feud began. Out of fear for his life, Jacob fled from home toward Syria. Esau, at age forty (who was already married to a Hittite woman—Gen. 26:34), also left home in anger and took a second wife, a daughter of Ishmael. The marriage was a visible retaliation against Isaac for blessing Jacob (Gen. 28:9). Esau assumed his father's death was near, as it is written: *“So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, ‘The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob’*” (Genesis 27:41 NKJV).

It is clear that Isaac thought he was dying and Esau assumed his father was near death. However, Isaac did not die at that season, but lived at least another twenty years. We know this because Jacob journeyed to Syria and remained there with his mother's brother, Laban, for twenty years

(Genesis 31:41). He returned to the Promised Land at the end of his exile and went to see his father Isaac (Genesis 35:27).

Twenty year prior, Isaac was on a deathbed, with dim eyesight and a desire for a last meal. But he was still alive twenty years later when Jacob returned! A renewed physical energy caused a reviving of the spirit and body of Isaac.

JACOB WENT FROM FAINTING TO FULFILLMENT

Now move ahead to Jacob, the third patriarch of the Hebrew clan. Jacob had twelve sons, Joseph being his favorite. The other eleven brothers were jealous and secretly sold Joseph into slavery. Returning home, they lied to their father and said Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They took Joseph's coat, dipped it in animal blood, and presented it as "visible evidence" of his slaying (Genesis 37). The Bible says that Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days (Gen. 37:34). Apparently, the circumstances overwhelmed Jacob to the point he felt that he, too, would die soon. We read, *"For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him"* (Gen. 37:35).

Jacob had many rough experiences in his life, but this was the climax of his distress. He told his sons that his gray hairs would be brought down to the grave (Genesis. 42:38; 44:29). For about thirteen years Jacob believed the lie that Joseph was dead. Imagine learning, after thirteen years of grief, that Joseph was alive and serving as a commander in Egypt!

The Bible records Jacob's reaction: his spirit revived (Genesis 45:27). The Hebrew word used here for revived is *chayah*, and is also used in reference to Elijah reviving a dead child (1 Kings 17:22) and the bones of Elisha reviving a dead man (2 Kings 13:21). When Jacob revived, he was imparted with new life, a new outlook, and a new vision for the future! In Genesis 46:30 Jacob was ready to die; yet he lived another seventeen years and passed away in Egypt, lying on a bed and blessing his sons (Genesis 49).

THE KEYS TO REVIVING AFTER LONG BATTLES

These early men of God are three examples in a row of family members who hit bottom physically and emotionally, yet came back for a strong finish in their race. I believe it is God's will for every Believer to finish their race strong. Like the Apostle Paul, God wants you to say that you have fought a good fight, finished your course, and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). Age creeps up and begins to tell us that we are getting old, and so it is time to step aside and let the younger generation take over.

Joshua at age eighty and Caleb at age eighty-five had a different spirit than the rest of the gossip-mongering wilderness complainers, and they both lived long enough to see the Promised Land conquered and to enjoy living in the land of God's promises! I believe hindering spirits will attempt to throw darts of discouragement at you when you begin to slow down physically and perhaps your mind is not as clear as when you were younger.

If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thought they would soon die,

yet they lived many years beyond their own expectations, what happened to bring such a reviving of their spirits? In each case something happened to bring about a feeling of despair:

- Abraham had lost his wife and lifelong sweetheart through death.
- Isaac's eyes were getting dim and he was unable to work as he once did.
- Jacob believed he had lost his favorite son through a premature, tragic death.

The death of a companion or a child, the death of a dream, or the decline in a person's health can bring a feeling of grief and despair to the human spirit. Yet in each of these instances, something happened to remove the hindrance and revive the spirit of each man:

- Abraham saw the joy of his son's marriage; then he himself remarried and was healed of his grief.
- Isaac lived long enough to ensure that Jacob would return to the land and begin the new nation.
- Jacob heard good news that lifted his spirits and recharged his future.

Concealed within these three stories are important spiritual applications. Abraham's narrative reveals how new friendships and relationships can revive your thinking and even your health. You can never replace a loved one who died, but God

can bring you special friends or a companion, thereby inspiring you to move forward and not resign your future to the grief of the past.

For decades I have lived a life of sitting behind a desk for many hours every day, reading, writing and researching the Word of God. After many years, my health began to be affected. I gained weight, became unusually tired after preaching, and found that my legs had begun to ache. After watching my seventy-eight-year-old father pass away from sickness that could have been prevented, I decided to make a change. In the past two years, I dropped forty pounds. My doctor made me very aware that I must exercise to maintain my health. I had little motivation to exercise, preferring instead to spend my time studying. However, now friends and staff remind me to exercise and join me in walking. If I have someone to talk to, I am able to walk two to four miles each time.

Pray and ask the Lord to bring you positive friendships and relationships that impart inspiration so that you will not lead yourself to expiration.

Isaac had two sons, and he knew that Jacob was chosen to bring forth the nation that God had promised through His Covenant. With Jacob gone and no grandchildren to fulfill the promise, Isaac lived long enough to see an entire tribe of sons born to Jacob over many years that he was away from home. Isaac died after he saw his grandchildren (Genesis 35:27-29).

My wife and I have two children and no grandchildren, but grandparents assure us there is nothing like having a grandchild. Those with grandchildren say that, after their own children began conceiving children, a renewed energy began to stir in them, inspiring them to see those grandbabies grow up

and to spend time with them, pray for them and brag on them.

Isaac was empowered to hold on to life for another twenty years, until he saw the fulfillment of the promise given to his father Abraham—that from their seed would come a mighty nation. Isaac saw the promised seed (Genesis 15:3-5) when he saw Jacob's sons.

Jacob's situation was unique, as he believed a lie for thirteen years. Then when the truth he was revealed, he was relieved, refreshed and revived. As long as men and women believe and accept the lies of the adversary, they will live in defeat and depression. Jacob had come to a point that he was willing to die, as it appeared his world had fallen apart. So many times, after a marriage breaks up, relationships are severed, or a loved one passes away, the enemy whispers that it is over for you. Quit; just give up. Like Jacob, sometimes all you need is a bit of good news to break the oppressive cycle: *"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country"* (Prov. 25:25).

The primary link in the narratives of all three of these men was their age when they thought their end had arrived. Abraham was about 140 years of age, Isaac around 160, and Jacob was about 130. Yet, their time of departure was set by God and not by their physical circumstances. The adversary will attack your health and mind, making you believe you are washed up, too old to be effective in ministry, and without strength to run one more lap in the race. You must be cautious not to accept the lies that can be planted into your mind—yes, even in the mind of a Believer!

Recently in my office at home, I found in my desk a letter my

father had written many years ago, in which he had a dream that he had died. In the letter he was telling me his desires for each of his four children, and he wrote down simple items, like a guitar and books, that he would leave us. The contents of the letter seemed like a final goodbye letter one would send a loved one before passing from this life. I was quite disturbed about his possible departure to heaven at that time and kept the letter in a drawer for future reference.

However, Dad did not pass away for many years. In fact, it was about eighteen years later that he went to be with the Lord. He wrote the letter while pastoring a church. He had pastored since the early 1960s, but something happened to revive him. In the 1990s, Dad resigned from pastoring, stepped out in faith, and began traveling as an evangelist. The transition brought a new spring to his step and a visible change that could be seen in his eyes and his posture. He loved preaching and was fulfilled in his final years by doing what he loved! A new assignment brought new life and a fresh vision. Without a vision you will perish (Prov. 29:18).

All three of the Biblical founders of the faith came to the same crossroads. The signs read, "You are too old and your journey is almost complete." Instead of choosing to stop and lie down on the road to die, they chose to cross the line and continue into the future. By choosing to extend their journey, God released a second wave of refreshing, making them fruitful in their latter days.

RELIEF FROM THE STRESSES OF LIFE

Few Christians can say they are "too blessed to be stressed,"

but many can say they feel “too stressed to be blessed.” Each person deals with stress differently. Some maintain exercise routines for relief. Others take vitamins and carefully guard their eating habits. Often working individuals plan extended vacations and seasons of time to get away from the work schedule and relax. However, you know that you are too stressed when you are still tired after the vacation; when you take care of yourself physically, yet you are still exhausted; and when you still feel emotionally drained after a regular exercise routine. Is there a spiritual remedy for being stressed out?

God established patterns of rest in our lives. In the Old Testament, the days of the week were not named; they were numbered, each correlating with the time of creation. There was the first day of the week, the second day of the week, and on through the seventh day of the week. Then following the seventh day, the weekly cycle started over again with the first day. In the Bible, the seventh day was Saturday and was called the Sabbath day. The Hebrew word Shabbat means rest. God created all things in six days and He rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3).

God revealed to Moses that the seventh day would be Israel's day of rest. They were to do no physical work on the Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3). This day of rest renewed the people in body, soul and spirit, and also gave the farm animals a day to recoup from working in the fields. Every seventh year the Hebrews also allowed the land to rest; that is, they did not sow the field on the seventh year. The fruit from the trees fell to the ground on the seventh year. From a practical perspective, this helped place nutrients back into the soil and improve the topsoil. During locust invasions, if there was no food in the

field, the locusts would pass over the land.

God established a day of rest, knowing that our body needs to cease from work. What is the best way to rest? We often rest physically, but not mentally. Other times, we can rest physically and mentally, but not spiritually. True rest is beneficial to the whole person—body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When the spirit of a person is fully renewed, the entire person will experience an atmosphere of peace and rest.

Spiritual rest comes through faith. Just listening to preaching with intellectual ears will not suffice, as many listeners hear Biblical teaching without faith rising in their spirit.

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

“For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, as I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

– HEBREWS 4:2-3

When Israel fell into unbelief and did not obey God, they wandered in circles in the wilderness for forty years. They were never able to enter into rest. However, Paul wrote, “For we which have believed do enter into rest...” (Hebrews 4:3). True faith in God’s Word and abiding in Him brings a rest to your spirit. Rest is more than physical repose one day a week. Rest is the ability to totally trust God without living under the stress

of the cares of life.

Several years ago the Holy Spirit impressed me to build a large gathering place for this generation to meet, have services, and build community. The architectural plans indicated the facility would cost sixteen million dollars. Because the primary purpose of the facility was for young people, three banks turned us down for loans. We had to place our trust entirely in the Lord to bring in the funds to complete the building debt free. Despite the fact that we needed millions of dollars, I knew without a doubt that I was in the complete will of God. When it is God's will, it is God's bill. The Lord spoke to individuals who, to this day, have remained anonymous to support us in this project. By the day of dedication, the building will be paid in full. To God we give all the glory!

In the Bible, we find that Christ Himself needed to rest:

- Matthew 14:13 - He went into a desert place apart...
- Matthew 14:23 - He went up into a mountain apart to pray...
- Matthew 17:1 - Jesus took Peter, James and John into a high mountain apart...

“And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.”

– MARK 6:31-32

The Greek word leisure means to “have a good time,” or to “spend quiet time.” Spiritual battles require seasons to come apart and to rest your mind, body and spirit, as a true spiritual battle impacts the strength in all three of those areas.

As an example, many years ago my grandfather on my father’s side experienced a total mental and physical breakdown. Dad received a phone call from a family member late one night and was asked to please go right away to Davy, West Virginia because his father, Bill, was acting odd and doing strange things, including cursing family and friends. I recall Dad packing a suitcase and driving through the night.

When his father answered the door, his eyes were glazed and he bent forward in a rough, deep voice and said, “What do you want preacher man? You think you can help your dad? Well, you won’t be able to!”

Dad’s brother Lewis had also arrived to help the family deal with this problem that now afflicted their father. Lewis was a Vietnam veteran, and was one of only eight men in his group to survive Vietnam and return home alive. After two days with Granddad Stone, Lewis told my dad, “Fred, I served in a war on the front line and this conflict is more draining to me than fighting a war. I can’t handle this.”

There was a strong negative atmosphere in the house, and the family needed to guard their father from harming himself.

Dad asked the Lord to reveal the problem that his father was dealing with. After receiving a spiritual dream in which the Lord revealed that the power of the Holy Spirit was required for the task of freeing his father, Dad prayed a mighty prayer of faith and his father was delivered from the tormenting spirits. His

dad later confessed that as my father was praying, he felt something choking him. He described what appeared to be seven creatures with the appearance of men coming out of his mouth, shaking their fist at Dad and cursing him.

Paul revealed that real spiritual warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against spirit rebels of different ranks and authority. However, Paul instructed Believers to “stand, having done all to stand, stand therefore” (Eph. 6:11-13). The phrase, “having done all to stand, stand,” refers to a soldier in battle who is engaged in head-to-head combat, and has become weary in faith; however, the soldier knows the seriousness of the moment and gains emotional strength to stand firm without giving up in the continued fight to pursue a victory. Paul is not telling us to exercise mind over matter to bring strength; he tells us to exercise the mind of Christ over what matters!

We assume that it is impossible to rest until we have won the battle and are waving a victory flag. But what do you do when a battle extends from days, to weeks, to months, and even to years? Spiritual rest can occur, even when a storm is raging. On one occasion the disciples and Christ were crossing the Sea of Galilee and a storm struck the lake. The boat filled with water, the disciples were unable to row against the contrary winds, and they began questioning if Christ was concerned that they were all going to drown.

Jesus, meanwhile, was asleep in the back of the ship. There He was—resting while the storm raged. Christ let the waves that rocked the boat put Him to sleep like a mother rocking a child in a rocking chair. Christ knew that the condition of the boat and the strength of the storm was not as powerful as His instruction to the group, “Let us go over to the other side” (see

Mark 4:35-41). Us included everyone in the ship.

During spiritual storms, spiritual attacks and other disruptions in life, some Believers will attempt use their own strength to row against the wind, only to wear themselves out and give up the ship to the circumstances surrounding them. Others will batten down the hatches and hope to ride it out, while all the time worrying about what might happen if the waves become too high and the winds too strong. Others will sit back and say, “This too will pass,” as they know that if Christ is in their ship, it means He is also in their storm.

Renewal can come only through resting in the Spirit. And rest can only occur when we take the time to receive renewal.

IN CONCLUSION

In this book I have shared several personal testimonies for two reasons. First, I want to help you see that even ministers of the Gospel who carry a call of God on their lives experience the same types of spiritual tests that every other person experiences. Secondly, I want to help you gain insight into how the enemy works and how you can overcome him with spiritual weapons.

As you grow in your spiritual walk and in the knowledge of God, you will learn by example and through experience. When you put the Word of God into practice, you will learn how to handle each new trial and test that comes your way. We have the Word of God, and He has given us the spiritual weapons. When tests and trials come, we need the patience to outlast the enemy. Do not give up in the midst of a battle. Through Christ, we have everything we need to overcome!

WHAT IS A HINDERING SPIRIT?

It is an evil spirit sent on a mission by the enemy for the purpose of hindering your God-given assignment by creating distractions, strange trials, and abnormal obstacles and frustrations, thus making your work trying, tiring and difficult.

In this book, Perry Stone reveals his personal testimony of how he encountered and overcame hindering spirits early in his ministry. This message exposes the assignments of the adversary and arms the Believer with practical and Biblical insight to help deal with attacks by hindering spirits from the demonic spirit realm.

Just as we saw in Scripture with the Apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh, the adversary has designed a plan of attack against the Believer and the church. Often he works through people. The manner in which we respond to the attack will determine the outcome of every spiritual conflict that we encounter.

Discover the joy and peace of overcoming the adversary as you read this book, *Dealing with Hindering Spirits*.



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Design by Michael Dutton • stonepress.com



Electronic edition produced by



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