

Followers Of The Way

Ancient Discipleship For Modern Christians

“Pray for good to overcome evil”

Tom Yacomeni

Ephesians 6v10-20 The armour of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Heavenly Father I pray that your Holy Spirit will come and lead us into all truth about prayer and spiritual warfare.

Over the past year the news has been full of wars and rumours of wars in various places. As well as Israel-Palestine and Ukraine, violence continues to claim tens of thousands of lives in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan and Myanmar. We watch the news and grieve for the hurting but often it can seem far removed from our experience of relative peace and freedom.

But imagine you woke up one winter's morning to the sound of a deep rumbling coming from outside the walls of your house. The very foundations seem to be shaking and as you open the curtains and peek out you see several enormous shapes clattering by, belching diesel fumes as they pass. It's only as they move into the early morning light that you make them out for what they really are: Massive tanks brandishing weapon systems and huge guns. The turrets are manned by masked soldiers clutching rifles scanning for targets through their sights. Yet you also notice that school children are walking chattering on the pavement next to them - seemingly unaware of the noise and the menace only inches away. A teacher chats to parents in the as they gather by the school gate. A man shuffles out and places his green box ready for recycling.

Imagine you discover you're the only one in your street who can see that war has come upon us, and yet no-one else seems to see the danger they're in.

You'd want to shout and warn people of the dangers, wouldn't you? 'Open your eyes! Can't you see what is going on?'

The reality is there is a spiritual war going on in Bath right now but most people are totally oblivious.

The Apostle Paul testified that when the Lord Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus he was told: 'I am sending you to [the gentile people] ¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.'

It may feel unsettling to acknowledge it but ever since Adam and Eve rejected God's authority in the garden of Eden, the bible tells us that the world has been subjected to the occupation of the devil. People are separated from God by a barrier of sin; they're lost in darkness and destined for death – unless someone invites them to come back to the light, and they receive the forgiveness and authority that Jesus won back for us on the cross when he died in our place that first Good Friday.

Our mandate is still the same as Paul's was 2000 years ago: To open people's eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. It was Paul that brought Christianity to Europe and because of his courage and clear message it eventually reached British shores and on down the generations to us here today. But until Christ returns the church still operates in battle conditions –

we are the agents of the Kingdom of God announcing Christ's victory, rescuing prisoners and driving back the spiritual forces of evil from our communities.

So why do I start off talking about spiritual warfare when today's topic is all about prayer? Well as Napoleon Bonaparte said 'the secret of war lies in the communications'.

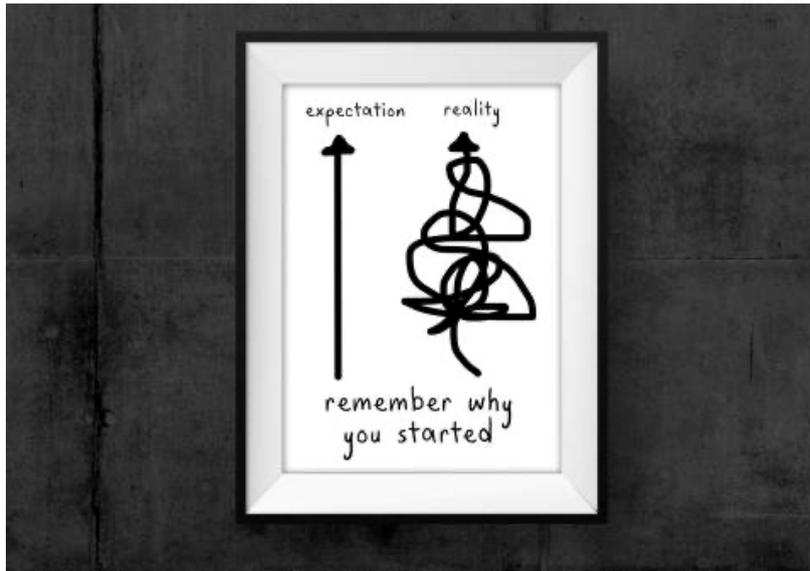
It is as we learn to pray effectively that change really happens and the kingdom of God comes on earth as it is in heaven.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray by saying the Lord's prayer, those few sentences not only encapsulate a huge amount of theology but they also inform us about how prayer works.

First of all when we say 'Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name' we remember that God is in charge and we are not. He is holy and we are not. He is our Father, we are all his children. We go to our Father for love, protection, teaching encouragement and resourcing.



Then we go on say 'your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Prayer helps us synchronise our will and priorities with Gods will and priorities. Prayer helps us get back on track when we have drifted rather like when my Satnav loses connection with the satellite signal and needs to reconnect to correct its position.



After praying for our needs for both our physical and spiritual daily bread, that's when the preparation to go out on the battle field takes place.

'Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us.'



No soldier would go into battle wearing something like this! In Ephesians 4 Paul says 'Don't give the devil a foothold... ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'

Unconfessed and unforgiven sin just sets us up for further pain. Don't give the devil a foothold...

Then the crunch lines –

'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil'

So this is now getting into the battle itself. We need the instructions of our heavenly commander in chief.

Where are the land-mines? Where are the ambushes? How are the rest of the troops doing?

When we understand that we are in the middle of a spiritual battlezone, what was once a personal moment of reflection becomes an intercession – standing in the gap for others. Notice that with the whole Lord's prayer it is always plural. It's not my heavenly Father, it's Our heavenly father. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.'

Soldiers on the ground not only pick up their own instructions but feed back intelligence on behalf of others. They locate the wounded and call for backup. They hear of advances and report victories.



Intercession and praying for others is vital for advancing the Kingdom of God, and we can think of it as advancing the war effort. We pray to release the resources of heaven where it is really needed. Prayer helps us shine our light in the right direction.

Let me read Simon Reed's excellent summary about praying for good to overcome evil which is the eighth Waymark for followers of the way of Jesus:

Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God. He taught his disciples to pray for its coming on earth as it is in heaven. We commit ourselves to praying for the coming of God's just and merciful rule in the situations and concerns that we encounter, following the example of St. Cuthbert and others who 'stormed the gates of heaven' with persevering prayer. We understand that as we do so we will sometimes encounter opposition and we recognise the existence of spiritual forces of evil (John 12:31, Ephesians 6:10-18). Prayer is central in overcoming them. We do not project onto this unseen dimension things for which human beings need to take responsibility, but we do seek to discern the spiritual influences at work. Such prayer is always related to positive action because our ultimate goal is to 'overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21)'

We know that prayer is the key to spiritual warfare, because Paul's teaching about the armour of God in Ephesians 6 leads directly into an exhortation to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Paul wrote these words while he was in prison, kept under lock and key by the Romans. As a Roman citizen and former Pharisee, Paul would have had every right to be angry at his treatment and to speak bitterly against his captors. But instead he writes that his struggle is not against human beings, but rather against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly realms.

Being physically restricted or confined to a prison cell can't prevent you from taking a stand and battling in the heavenlies.

Paul emphasises that the importance of being prepared to take our stand *when* the day of evil comes. Not *if* the day of evil comes but *when*. When the enemy attacks we come under fire from flaming arrows and our job is to hold our ground and not to be pushed back in our faith.

So what might these flaming arrows look like for us?

As we see illustrated throughout the Bible the devil attacks through the thoughts and ideas that invade our heart and mind which erode our faith and leave us feeling exposed, isolated and condemned.

- Temptation – Luke 4 The Devil tempted Jesus about his provision, purpose and identity. The Devil tempts us with moral failures on multiple levels

- Doubt – Genesis 3v1 ‘Did God really say...?’
- Offense – Matt 5v44 Pray for those that persecute you
- Deception – John 8v44 The Devil is the Father of Lies
- Destruction – John 10v10 The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy

Putting on the armour of God means we are able to guard our hearts and minds. Proverbs 4v23. ‘Above all else guard your heart – it is the wellspring of your life’. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith and the shoes of the good news all serve to remind us that we are saved by *grace*, through faith and this is not from ourselves - it is the gift of God. When you first cry out to God and repent of your sins, the forgiveness of Christ washes you clean, gives you a new heart and covers you for all eternity. You might get dirty feet on the journey, so we pray for daily cleansing for that, but fundamentally we can resist the devil’s accusations of our failure and guilt, because as it says in Romans 8v1 ‘There is now therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus’.

I find it fascinating that Paul starts with something that doesn’t seem all that protective. Yet for the Roman soldier the belt was vital – it was the thing that protected his private parts, held his breastplate in place and provided a place to hang his sword. A deep knowledge of the absolute truth of the God of the bible will help us understand the ways in which our view of truth and our world view is distorted by the culture around us.



The last piece of armour is also interesting – the sword of the Spirit – which is the word of God. God’s spoken words are powerful – by them the world was created – and in the same way our declarative words of prayer unleash the creative forces of heaven. We see Jesus quoting scripture when he battled the devil in the Wilderness, so our knowledge of God’s faithful promises are key for taking our stand and praying about situations that threaten to overwhelm us.

Prayer doesn’t deny the responsibility we have for positive action – if we pray for someone in trouble, perhaps part of the answer will be to work out ways we can help them.

When we pray, we are not pleading with God to love us more – he already loves us without limit. We are praying to receive instruction, to get in synch with God’s plans, release heaven’s resources and for renewed strength and authority to take our stand against the devil and his schemes.

A little later on we will be declaring again the goodness of God as we remember through communion the victory Jesus won on the cross for us.

Jesus is the victor, Satan is just a loser. As we declare that truth over our town and over our lives, the spiritual forces of evil will be driven back.