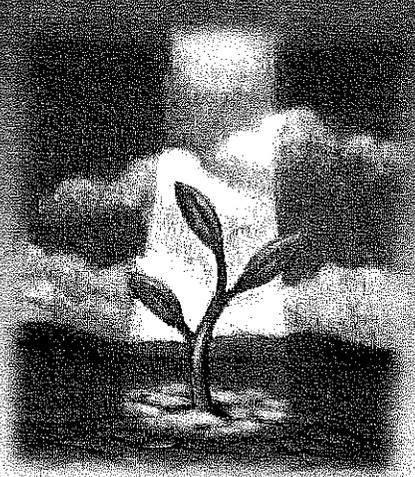




A HAMEWITH BOOK

RESTORING THE CHRISTIAN SOUL



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO COMPLETION
IN CHRIST THROUGH HEALING PRAYER

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CHAPTER 12

The Gift of Battle

We are not sent to battle for God, but to be used by God in His battlings.
(Oswald Chambers)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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. Therefore put on the full armor 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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 saints.

(Ephesians 6:10-18)

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.

(St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

Jesus said, "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). Such a "hard" saying of our Lord's chases many of us time and again to a full study of the Sermon on the Mount. In that discourse, Jesus makes a number of statements like this one, and in doing so, contradicts and overturns the best Jewish wisdom of the day. A study of these words reveals, as Oswald Chambers says,

the humiliation of being a Christian. Naturally, if a man does not hit back, it is because he is a coward; but spiritually if a man does not hit back, it is a manifestation of the Son of God in him. When you are insulted, you must not only not resent it, but make it an occasion to exhibit the Son of God. You cannot imitate the disposition of Jesus; it is either there or it is not. To the saint personal insult becomes the occasion of revealing the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus.²

Our Lord's words can never be understood or lived out in the natural. They have to do with the Paschal mystery and with Incarnational Reality, the fact that Another, the One crucified for sin, lives in us and that He is Love. We are to listen for a higher wisdom and collaborate with it. If we are to overcome in spiritual conflict, we must move forward in the knowledge of Christ's Presence with us and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as these operate through listening prayer. In doing this, more often than not we are sent scurrying back to our Lord's words in this discourse. To experience real spiritual battle is to know what real enemies are. (Many think they are in a spiritual battle when they are merely beset due to lack of knowledge and wisdom as to how to deal with matters.) Nothing will send us back to Christ's words about loving our enemies more quickly than a skirmish with those who truly hate the word of truth (Christ and His gospel) and therefore hate and malign us. We soon find out if we are battling partly in our own strength, and we cry out for mercy to battle only in His.

In *Crumbling Foundations*, Dr. Donald Bloesch writes of our need to pray for the "gift of battle." In a section entitled "Rediscovering the Spiritual Gifts," he reminds us that "Christians can only live out their vocation by discovering and exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit," and he writes of this additional gift which he says is alluded to in both Testaments. As a theologian and a keen observer of the times, he believes this gift of battle has a crucial significance for our day:

Christians who are under the cross of persecution need to pray for the gift of battle, the ability to endure under trial, the boldness to challenge immorality and heresy in high places. The gift of battle is properly included in the gift of might or power (Isaiah 11:2). It is the power to enter into conflict and the stamina not to grow weary. It must be accompanied by and fulfilled in the gift of love, since we cannot wage war against sin successfully unless we love the sinner. We must speak the truth, but we must speak the truth in love.³

Speaking the truth in a love born of God is, it seems to me, the greater part of the gift of battle. There is nothing weak about this love, for truth—full orbbed and aptly spoken—is incredibly powerful.

A first principle in spiritual warfare is the knowledge that we cannot function in the gift of battle without *agape*, the gift of divine love coming from God's life within and issuing forth through us. In such a stance, our trust will be wholly in Him. We will be looking to no other power, no other intervention—but His. This looking straight to God and receiving His battle plan keeps us on a safe ground in another very important matter—we know that we are to hate sin, but we are not to hate our enemy.

The following, a prayer from a Greek Orthodox liturgy, has a permanent and prominent place in my prayer journal. It helps me pray aright for my enemy when the battle is at its height and I am least able to muster up my own words for such a prayer. An absolutely wonderful one, it has within it the true spirit of Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

Save, O Lord, and have mercy upon those that envy and affront me and do me mischief, and let them not perish through me, a sinner.

Prayer such as this is what loving our enemy is all about.

A second principle is that we cannot function in the gift of battle apart from mature prayer partners. They are the foot soldiers who trudge alongside us, persevering in the same battle:

Christians who enter the battle against the powers of darkness cannot persevere without a life-support system, without a supportive fellowship that continually holds up its members in intercession to the living God.⁴

Those of us who have these "life-support" systems are deeply grateful for them, but those who do not must pray earnestly for them. The intercessions of the saints who gather together in Christ's name to pray for us are absolutely vital in the Christian walk, and most assuredly so in spiritual warfare. God's gift to us of precious souls that not only intercede for us, but hear and pass on the word that God is speaking when we are sore besieged and fainting is true wealth. All through the years when God would move me from one locale to another, the first thing I besought God for was trusted prayer partners. I often had to train Christians in prayer, but God always sent them, maybe only one for a while. Then another or so would be added. My prayer partners are among my greatest spiritual treasures. To watch God at work in their souls and ministries is an amazing reward in itself, only one of many, many that these "masterpieces" of God's love, these servants of His, bring. I am confounded and amazed to see how rare it is that pastors and leaders have prayer partners such as these. Often they fear to share with others, and there will be no corporate listening for God's voice or intercession for others that is worthy of the name. No one can stand

long in battle under these conditions or win the prize of pressing through to victory in the vocations we've been assigned.

I recently prayed with a precious, strong leader in the Body of Christ. She was undergoing the worst spiritual warfare that the archenemy of our souls can muster, and the fierce battle had brought her excruciating suffering. This pain enabled her for the first time to understand what it means to enter into the sufferings of Christ. In coming up against deeply entrenched evil within the church and taking her stand against it, she became the target of astonishing lies, vicious slander, and all manner of verbal abuse. Her very ministry was in question. Weary beyond belief at the strength and the length of the battle, she despaired of surviving the onslaught. *She had strong prayer partners, however, who were standing with her as the battle grew more impossible.* Then as we (the PCM team) came together in prayer with them, we received these incredible words from God. This leader opened her heart and received them, and these words set her back firmly upon her feet and restored to her the vocation (the message of salvation) she has been intrusted with. These are but a few of the words:

Laura [not her real name] is to lift up her voice; she is to exalt the Lord in the assembly of the people. There will be a glorious vindication—her voice is not to be silenced.

There is a new armor for Laura; it is the armor of love God is going to put on her. She is going to be able to face her enemies with a powerful love. She will be overawed at how this love will come through her. She will go forth in this armor. She is not to strive, for she will feel no need to protect herself.

Most who have suffered in the way this servant of the Lord has would feel the need to put up walls and to take protective measures for themselves and their families. But she is not going to. She has entered into the sufferings of Christ. Therefore, she is facing an enemy whose battle plan is designed to stop her mouth from speaking the truth of the gospel and her entire being from living out the truth that Another, the Holy, All Powerful One, is with her. But she has put on the full armor of God, and has asked for and received the gift of battle.

While the archaccuser of our souls, the enemy who would deceive and bring under dark deception even the elect, plans the full destruction of ourselves as persons, we like Laura battle and overcome under the Lord's banner—His holy cross and its way of love (Hebrews 2:10) and not according to the way the world fights:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

The Scriptures refer to this battle that engages the whole of our being as a good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18-19), and "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). It is against "the world" (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4-5), the flesh (Romans 7:23; 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 2:11), our enemies (Psalm 38:19; 56:2-4; 59:3), and ultimately, behind and energizing these things, the archenemy of all that God has created and called good, Satan himself (Genesis 3:15; 2 Corinthians 2:11; James 4:7-10; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 12:17).

The Scriptures exhort us to diligence in the warfare (1 Timothy 6:12; Jude 3); and it is to be undertaken with faith and good conscience (1 Timothy 1:18-19), steadfastness (1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Hebrews 10:23), watchfulness (1 Corinthians 16:13-14), sobriety (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8), endurance (2 Timothy 2:3, 10), self-denial (1 Corinthians 9:25-27), with confidence in God (Psalm 27:1-3), and with prayer (Psalm 35:1-3).

In the ministry God has entrusted to us on the Pastoral Care Ministries Team, we never cease to be amazed at the myriad and unexpected ways God protects (Psalm 140:7), delivers (2 Timothy 4:18), helps (Psalm 118:13; Isaiah 41:13-14), comforts (2 Corinthians 7:5-7), encourages (Isaiah 41:11-12; 51:12; 1 John 4:4), and strengthens (Psalm 20:2; 27:14; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Timothy 4:17) us in the midst of spiritual battle—even the worst warfare. It is not unusual, when ministering to the most injured, those just coming out of sinful and perverted lifestyles, to see God deliver several hundred people at one time out of the worst sicknesses of mind as well as the related condition of being seriously demonized. Here we are faced with many caught up in the worst spiritual darkness, having lost the battle due to sin and being outside of Christ. In such moments, we know not only the holy Presence of God and His mighty power at work, but at times our eyes are opened and we see the heavenly host working with us! And we are shown different kinds of angels! For example, at times in helping women severely wounded through misogyny, two of the most unusual angels come! We have to go back to the books of Ezekiel and Daniel for the words and images to describe them! These are powerful angels, and they are apparently especially concerned with the evil that women sustain in war and through misogyny. They are there helping us when these women are to be set free! We see through a glass darkly now, but someday our Lord will explain all these things to us. In the meantime it suffices to say that we, as the Body of Christ, have hardly started to draw on the divine resources our God longs to send. There is joy and victory in the midst of real battle and real suffering.

When the Enemy Is the Beloved Enemy

For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the members of his own household. (Micah 7:6)

Often the enemy takes advantage of opposition that arises within our most intimate circles—our close relatives or friends in the Body of Christ—to stir up the most heart-rending kind of spiritual warfare. This especially occurs where an effective ground-breaking ministry is at stake. Always in such demonized warfare, there will be slander and lies. I've yet to see a case like this where a root sin of envy did not have to be exposed and reckoned with as well. Oddly enough, that dread vice is rarely recognized for what it is today.

The tenth chapter of Matthew is concerned with this kind of opposition. When I first began to teach on the healing of relationships through forgiveness of sin, I experienced the most bizarre and irrational opposition, lies, and slander from certain quarters. I would never have expected it to come from that source. The situation was rife with demonic spirits, which also surprised me. Until we've been in the ministry for a good while, we seem to expect these kinds of fierce, obviously demonically inspired battles to happen to other people—not ourselves. I went flat on my face before God. Spiritual battle brings all manner of confusion, so I had a lot of "thinking through" to do with God; and of course I had to forgive and keep on forgiving the same persons, and to intercede and keep on interceding for them. In order to do all this and to keep track of the understanding God was giving me through the Scriptures and the ways He was leading me to pray, I set aside in my prayer journal an entire section entitled, "Beloved Enemies." This section is filled with Scriptures that deeply ministered to me and with prayers God gave me to pray for these dear ones. I can call them that with all sincerity, for they are loved. Had I not learned to pray for them and for the situation effectively, I do not believe I would be able to make that statement. Perhaps I would not have been able to stand in the ministry at all, for the enemy's plan was to bring it down through discouraging me personally. The nature of the warfare would most surely have done that had I not learned to pray for my beloved enemies—those closest to me who opposed the work God has called me to do.

"Painting the Dragon Red"

The Lord delights in showing us how to pray. The earlier we get around to asking Him in each situation, the better off we'll be. When I seemed to be getting nowhere in my battle, I finally cried out in desperation, "Lord, what and how am I to pray for my enemies? Those beloved ones who slander me and the work You've given me to do?"

And God promised to give me a blueprint! Several days later, as I was praying, He did. We on the team call this our "paint-the-dragon-red" prayer. We've helped many other Christians embroiled in spiritual battle by sharing it with them. It contains sound principles that everybody seems to need once the battle is joined:

1) Pray that the eyes of all who surround these persons be opened to see the situation as it really is.

2) Pray that their associates will be given ways to speak truth and light into the situation.

In these first two steps, we are praying for godly illumination and wisdom for the persons who can minister truth and peace into the situation, while at the same time we are praying for their safety. We are asking that these stable people be spared from getting caught up in the dark net of spiritual confusion and deception—a very present danger in spiritual warfare—and that they be enabled to aid others who are ensnared.

As I meditated on these first two ways of prayer, the Lord greatly ministered the story of David and Goliath to me, this truth from 1 Samuel 17:47 in particular: ". . . it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's. . . ." I then asked, "Jesus, what is the smooth stone, slung at your command that will stop the Goliaths of envy, slander, murderous hate, all that is the enemy of Your cross, Your message?"

And immediately I heard in my spirit, "Truth, truth will out—it will hit the mark." Then the following instruction is what caused us to name this way of interceding the "paint-the-dragon-red" prayer:

3) Pray that any demonic power within these persons or within these situations manifest itself—that it may be clearly discerned and seen by all the people.

C. S. Lewis has rightly said that "Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness."⁵ This is terribly hard on the "beloved enemy," but it is the only way he will be healed. In answer to this prayer, God causes the real enemy of all our souls to be revealed for all to see.

There will, of course, always be some unwilling to see and repent. They blind themselves by continuing to rationalize their sin. It is here that the root sin of envy will often be revealed—the sin that has opened the door for the demonic dragon to enter and has provided a nest from which it can strike within the Kingdom, a nest that can also harbor others of its demonic kind. When this happens, we invoke and practice the Presence of God and find that, "Wherever Jesus is, the storms of life become a calm."⁶ We find also that He is doing a work within ourselves that could never have been done apart from the disciplines learned through sustained spiritual warfare.

After this third point, the Lord quickened 1 Samuel 14:15 to me. That Scripture verse gave me further insight into the model for taking the offensive in intercessory prayer. I saw that Jonathan and his armor-bearer, only two men, put the entire Philistine army to flight as they fought for God's people. They stepped out in faith, speaking the word of truth, and the Lord worked with them: "Then panic struck the whole army . . . and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God."

Here we see so clearly what it means to be used by God in *His* (not our) battlings. When we step out at His command, He sends the panic or whatever else is needed. There is an illusory nature to evil. It attempts to win through bluff—through puffing itself up to horrendous size. One word of truth, spoken

in the power of the Holy Spirit, solid as a rock and splendid as eternity, flies swift as the surest arrow to puncture evil's swelled balloon of lies, posturing, and bravado. Then panic sets in. There are times when we pray, "Send Your panic, Lord," and He does. We do not fight with words—we speak and live the truth, and God does the fighting.

The fourth step the Lord gave in this "paint-the-dragon-red" prayer is ever so important. It underlines the fact that our battle is against sin and not against the sinner:

4) Ask that what can be salvaged (in this situation and in the lives of your enemies) be saved, humbled, blessed by the Spirit of God.

With this, I wrote out these instructions from the Lord:

Pray for the health, the wholeness, of your enemies. Pray for the salvaging of all that is good, beautiful, and true within them. I do a great work, one that will amaze you. Be at rest now from all that besets, offends, attacks—love, write, pray, live in peace in My Presence. Enter the timelessness of My joy and peace.

That our God is faithful to hear and answer all prayer, including these prayers, is something I want to shout from the housetop. With the prophet Micah, I was given the grace to say: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me" (Micah 7:7).

And He did. If we are obedient and stand in Him, our God has an incredible way of turning our battle wounds into healing power for others even while He is yet pouring His healing grace and light into the worst of our gashes.

PRAYER

Lord bring us, especially those of us called to lead in the church, to the point where we can truthfully say with St. Paul: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything." (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)