

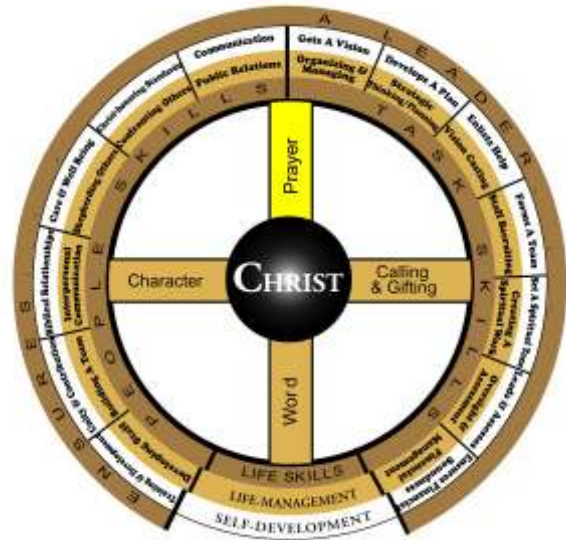
Leadership University

Core Components – Prayer

Engaging the Unseen Foe

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Issues: Prayer is warfare with a defeated but still powerful enemy. When we allow our prayer lives to remain only on the level of immediate or “felt” needs, we risk the great danger of losing the struggle that God is ultimately interested in.

There’s a chapter in history of the nation of Israel that I believe graphically illustrates the way we tend to operate as Christians.

Second Kings 3 records the account of Joram, the king of Israel, going into battle against the king of Moab. Joram did not seek God’s help or guidance for the fray; he simply made the decision and then enlisted the alliance of his former countryman, Jehoshaphat (king of Judah). Jehoshaphat didn’t pray either. After gathering up the king of Edom, they all went charging into battle.

In verse 9 we find out that they got into a supply problem: they ran out of water in the middle of the desert. Suddenly they wanted God’s help, and only then did they begin to pray (their method of praying was to seek the prophet). Their *felt need* was the focus of their prayer.

Water for their men and animals was a very important detail for those kings. But they were not out in the desert to drink water: they were there to fight a battle. Notice how God answered when he spoke to the prophet Elisha: “You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink. This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord; he will also hand Moab over to you” (verses 17-18). God had not forgotten the objective: to win the battle over the Moabites. The kings, however, had lost sight of why they were out there, because they were preoccupied with their immediate need.

THE TRUE BATTLEGROUND

As Christians, our prayer lives tend to dwell in the realm of water shortages. We seldom operate in the realm of true spiritual warfare. Go to an average prayer meeting, and I guarantee that 75 percent of the prayer requests will be for felt needs: for example, Jim’s neck. Now Jim’s neck needs to be healed, and I hope we are praying about it. But we never seem to get into the battle. As I’ve told my Sunday school class, “The only way that you can get prayed for at our church is to be in the hospital or out of a job.”

One year at Thanksgiving time I flew out to southern California to speak at a mission conference. My goal was to stimulate a vision among students and young military personnel for recruiting laborers for the harvest field. When I arrived at the Los Angeles airport, however, no one was there to meet me.

After wandering around the gate area and the baggage claim for forty-five minutes, I called the conference grounds. No answer. I thought, well, I'll get my secretary on this-she knows how to take care of these things. But when I called long-distance back to Colorado Springs, no one answered the phone there either! Then I remembered that it was the Friday after Thanksgiving and the office was closed. There I was, *stuck*.

It was then that I resorted to prayer: "Lord, if there is anyone in this airport looking for me," I prayed, "help him to find me." Not having much faith that my prayer was going to be answered, I headed out a nearby door to catch a bus to Pasadena. On my way out, I ran into a familiar-looking man on his way in. He was looking for me.

That was one of the quickest answers to prayer that I have ever experienced. Later on, however, I asked myself this question: "Did I pray as fervently for the real mission for which I was sent to southern California as I did that someone might find me at the airport?" In that airport, I was like Joram and Jehoshaphat, stranded in the desert without water. But the real reason I was there was not to get picked up at the airport, but to have a part in recruiting laborers for the harvest field. Jesus told us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers. That was the real battle.

There are three military terms that I feel illustrate various types of prayer: strategic, tactical, and logistical. *Strategic* refers to the ultimate objective-to defeat the enemy-and the overall plan, or strategy, to bring him into submission. *Tactical* means the specific battles necessary to achieve the ultimate objective. *Logistical* is simply supplying the physical needs of the army fighting the battle.

I believe that 75 to 80 percent of our prayer is for logistical items. For water in the desert. For someone to find us at the airport. For that sick person in the hospital. For the one who lost his job. All of these things are important, and we should be praying for them. But those kinds of things are almost all we pray about.

I would guess that 15 to 20 percent of our prayer effort is tactical, related to specific engagements with the enemy-the spiritual results of the conference I spoke at, for example. But that conference was only a specific operation; the overall objective was raising up laborers.

Very little of our prayer effort is strategic, or focused on our ultimate objective-the battle that God is really interested in. We need to remember that when we pray, we are entering into spiritual warfare. We are engaging a defeated but still powerful enemy: Satan, our unseen foe.

There are four primary aspects of this kind of warfare that are crucial to our success: first, understanding our enemy; second, identifying and learning to use the weapons with which to fight him; third, understanding the nature of our struggle with him; and fourth, focusing on the right objective in our attempts to defeat him.

UNDERSTANDING OUR ENEMY

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul says that 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.” Our warfare is with the devil and all of his evil angels. They are the spiritual forces Paul refers to in this passage.

The New Testament tells us four facts about the devil that we need to know in order to combat him. First, he is the ruler, with evil angels under him, of a kingdom in which all of the unsaved are held. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers that they were formerly dead in their sins, he was saying the same about us. We used to *live* in our sins when we followed “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2). We all used to follow the devil because we were all in his kingdom, under his dominion. When God commissioned Paul, he sent him to turn the Gentiles, the unsaved, “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18).

Not only does Satan hold the unsaved under his reign, but he also blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). That’s why witnessing often seems like pouring water off a duck’s back. Our speech comes across like a foreign language; the unbeliever just can’t understand.

When we witness to someone, we are launching an attack upon Satan’s kingdom. We cannot win this attack by our own power, because that person is under Satan’s dominion, and he is blinded by him. Jesus said that we cannot enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions until we first bind that strong man (Matthew 12:29). The strong man is the devil, and we bind him through prayer. That’s why we must enter into battle *in prayer* before we engage the unsaved in a witnessing situation.

The third fact that the Bible tells us about Satan is that he wars against believers, even though we have been delivered from his dominion into the kingdom of God. First Peter 5:8 says that he prowls around like a roaring lion is intended to symbolize the ferociousness of Satan.

When he attacks us in order to ruin us, however, he masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). In Scripture, light stands for either truth or moral purity. When Paul says that Satan masquerades as an angel in the light, he means that Satan tries to convince us that his false teaching is the truth. When he tempted Jesus in the desert, saying, “Cast yourself down because it is written, ‘He will hold you up’,” Satan twisted the truth.

Secondly, Timothy 2:22-26 tells us that Satan’s masquerade can be so deceptive that he actually takes believers captive to do his will. This is not demon-possession, but rather a diversion of our minds into false teaching, unimportant or peripheral issues, temptations, discouragement, and doubts about the truth of God’s word.

I vividly remember an event that occurred to me while going through an intense spiritual battle. I was looking at a particular promise in Scripture, when Satan planted this thought in my mind: “It isn’t true, is it?” That was just as clear in my mind as if he had spoken in a voice. He was seeking to make me captive to do his will by attacking my mind with false teaching.

We are at war with an enemy who has thousands of years of experience. Satan attacked Eve in the Garden of Eden, and he has been attacking God's people ever since. He knows his strategy, and he is not locked up in logistics.

But Scripture gives us a fourth (and the most important) fact about Satan: he is a defeated foe. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus Christ disarmed the powers and authorities and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross." This is the reason James can tell us, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Satan has lost the big war. He is now engaged in guerilla warfare against us, and we can defeat him in this day-to-day struggle.

USING THE RIGHT WEAPONS

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul gives us a clue to the kind of weapon we need to battle Satan:

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.

The war we are engaged in is for the minds and souls of people. Our weapons are not physical, nor are they those of human logic and cleverness. They are divine.

When you are engaged in battle and the objective is a person's mind, what are you going to use? The truth. Satan masquerades as an angel of truth, but we combat him with the real truth – the word of God. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 to put on the full armor of God, so that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. The list of armor is primarily defensive: helmet, breastplate, belt, sandals, shield and so forth.

In verse 17, however, Paul says, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the *word* of God." There are two Greek words that are translated, "the word of God." One of them is *logos*, referring to Scripture in general. The other is a word that focuses on a specific passage of Scripture. In this verse, Paul is referring to the specific word of God – individual passages of the Bible that are brought to bear on individual passages of the Bible that are brought to bear on individual battles. Just as Jesus answered Satan with specific passages of Scripture from the Old Testament when he was tempted in the desert, so we fight Satan with specific passages of Scripture that apply to the situation at hand.

Our first weapon in battling our foe is the word truth. In verse 18 of Ephesians 6, Paul gives us our second: "and pray in the Spirit." The second weapon is prayer. Whether we are evangelizing the lost, disciplining believers, or trying to restore a lapsed brother or sister, the weapons are always the same: the word of truth accompanied by prayer in the Spirit. We need the Spirit of God to open our minds and release us from Satan's captivity.

The battle for the souls of men and women is really not won in the witnessing encounter or the disciplining meeting, but in prayer, before we ever get into those situations. Our actions are of course necessary, but it is futile to fight without paving the way by prayer against the devil.

THE NATURE OF OUR STRUGGLE

We are at war against a powerful, unseen foe. And our weapons are the word of God and prayer. In order to use these weapons successfully, we need to have an adequate understanding of the kind of warfare we are engaged in.

Several times, Paul uses a word related to prayer that means to struggle or to agonize. It is the word from which we get our word *agony*. The same word is translated “fight” in Timothy 6:12 – “Fight the good fight of faith.” Paul also uses this word in Colossians 1:28-29: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, *struggling* [or agonizing] with all his energy, which so powerfully works with me.” Here Paul is talking about our first weapon, the word of truth. But in chapter two, verse 1 of his letter to the people at Colossae he continues, “I want you to know how much I am *struggling* for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.” In 1:29 Paul means, “I agonize in the ministry of the word.” In 2:1 he means, “I agonize in the ministry of prayer.” Both indicate intense fighting. Paul wasn’t just praying about those in the hospital and the unemployed. He was in the heat of the battle.

In Colossians 4:12, Paul commends Epaphras for the same kind of struggling: “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always *wrestling* [always agonizing, always waging war] in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” Epaphras had his eye on the battle. He wanted these people to grow up in Christ and stand firm in the will of God. He wasn’t just concerned about their logistical or felt needs. He was concerned about the spiritual aspects of their lives. And he waged war in prayer.

Are you in the battle? Have you agonized in prayer lately? Or are you still preoccupied with the material things of your life, as Joram was for the need of the real battle and the real enemy?

FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT OBJECTIVE

Once we’ve faced the enemy, armed ourselves with the right weapons, and prepared ourselves for the rigors of battle, we can still jeopardize our success by losing sight of God’s ultimate objective in this spiritual warfare.

What is God’s objective? “For God so loved the world.” God so loved people that he gave his only begotten son. Christ died for them. This is God’s objective: people; not being found at the airport, or even having a great mission conference. Those are logistical and tactical operations.

In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, “All people on earth will be blessed through you.” This hasn’t happened yet. Our job is to engage the enemy in warfare, to see that it does happen. God’s plan is going to be fulfilled, but he has ordained that this plan be carried out through prayer.

There are 4½ billion men, women and children on this earth right now. Most of them have never received the gospel. Have you prayed God’s promises into fulfillment for any of

those people lately? Are you engaging Satan in battle through prayer? Are you asking God to bind the strong man, and claiming Christ's victory on the Cross?

Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. He told to pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up laborers. The battle is not with unemployment and sickness and transportation arrangements. Those are necessary logistical items, and I am not saying that we shouldn't pray for those things. God is aware of our friend in the hospital, or the man or woman out of a job. But I think that his attitude toward them is embodied in what he said to Joram: "This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord." They are logistical details. He will also hand the enemy over to us.

My challenge to you is this: keep praying for your friend in the hospital, and keep praying for your friend who needs work. But remember that these are light things in the eyes of the Lord. Ask God to get you into the heat of the real battle. Ask him to equip you to engage the unseen foe, and then take your prayer life into the war for God's ultimate objective. And expect him to hand Moab over to you.

Praying Strategically

Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

2 Corinthians 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Matthew 12:29 Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

2 Timothy 2:22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. **23** Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. **24** And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **25** correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. **4** For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. **5** We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

- 1. That the work the prince of the power of the air is doing in the sons of disobedience will be hindered**
- 2. That God will use the enemy’s work to help those lost see their need for Him.**
- 3. That God would continue to give the gift of new life to many**
- 4. That God would transform even more people so the immeasurable riches of His kindness might be shown in the coming ages**
- 5. That God’s children would have discernment to know the good works He’s prepared in advance for them to do and not get sidetracked by the enemy doing other things.**
- 6. That the enemy’s lies about identity would be exposed and refuted so God’s children may truly know who they are in Him**
- 7. That God would continue to bring many near through the blood of Christ**
- 8. That the dividing wall of hostility the enemy has built would be broken down between believers as well as between races!**
- 9. That the enemy’s attempts to create division would be thwarted and there would be peace among all members of God’s body**
- 10. That the enemy would be bound from trying to distract and keep believers from enjoying and utilizing the access we have to God through the Spirit.**
- 11. That all believers would gain a vision for being built together and that the designs of the enemy to encourage individualism would be thwarted.**
- 12. That the power of Satan would be revealed for the evil it is, so even the lost recognize this!**
- 13. That God would triumph over Satan enabling those the enemy has blinded to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.**
- 14. May the enemy be bound so his house and goods can be plundered to the advantage of God’s kingdom**
- 15. That Satan in his disguises will be exposed so believers and even the lost can see through his attempts to deceive them into thinking he is good and right.**
- 16. That those who’ve been captured by Satan to do his will come to their senses and escape his snare**
- 17. That God will continue to disarm the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them in Jesus**
- 18. That Satan’s strongholds will be destroyed!!!**
- 19. That believers will submit themselves to God and resist the devil.**
- 20. That God will enable us to destroy every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of Him.**
- 21. That the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into His harvest**

22. That God's children will identify what their gifts are, develop them and use them specifically for building up the body and not get sidetracked using them for personal gain or lazy and not use them at all!
23. That those gifted to equip the saints would have wisdom in knowing how to do this and follow God regarding what part of His body they are assigned to build up!
24. That the attempts of the enemy to make believers believe lies that they have nothing to offer would be thwarted!
25. That each part of God's body will continue to grow up into maturity!
26. That the enemy's schemes to toss immature believers about would be thwarted!
27. That we will be fully yielded to God's power that's work within us
28. That God will get all the glory!!!

Praying Tactically

1. That God will give us words as we proclaim the mystery of the gospel
2. That He will enable us to proclaim it boldly as we ought to speak
3. That those we disciple may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God
4. That the Word of Christ may dwell richly in us and those we disciple
5. That God will enable us to teach & admonish one another with all wisdom
6. That He will give us songs to sing and prompt us to sing them often
7. That we will abound in thankfulness, especially in our hearts to God
8. That God will grant us to live in such harmony in accord with Christ Jesus that together with one voice we may glorify God
9. That we (and all God's children) may be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing our labor in Him is not in vain!
10. That our love will abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment
11. That God may strengthen us with power through His Spirit in our inner beings so Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith
12. That we being rooted and grounded in love may have power together with all the saints to grasp the incredible dimensions of God's love and know His love that surpasses knowledge so we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God!
13. May the God of peace grant us peace at all times and in every way.
14. That believers will speak the truth in love and grow up in every way into Jesus
15. That each part will work properly so the body grows and builds itself up in love, loving earnestly

Luke 10: 2 And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **14** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Praying Tactically

Ephesians 6: 19 (pray) also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Colossians 4:12 that (those we disciple) may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Romans 15:5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, **6** that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Philippians 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

Ephesians 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.