

Engaging in Spiritual Warfare and Exercising Spiritual Authority

Skills for Spiritual Warfare and Spiritual Authority

Sermon Series Starting February 2, 2025

Thesis: We are a people who want to grow in our capacity, skill, and desire to reach others with the love of God.

Text: John 1:1-42; Acts 26:12-18; 1 John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Today (2'16'25), we want to talk about the reality of Spiritual Warfare and the keys of intimacy and prayer.

In this sermon series, we are talking about *Engaging in Spiritual Warfare and Exercising Spiritual Authority*. Spiritual warfare is part of our current context as we reach others with the love of God.

Our desire is to develop new *Skills for Spiritual Warfare and Spiritual Authority*.

We are making a journey together with the Lord and with each other in 2025 in reaching others with the love of God.

Spiritual Warfare: It Is a Reality of Scripture

In teaching his disciples how to pray, the Lord Jesus acknowledged the reality of the enemy and warfare: *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13)*. Spiritual warfare was a part of the worldview of Jesus.

Spiritual warfare is also a part of the rest of Scripture. For example, Paul understood the “cosmic-geographical worldview arising from Deuteronomy 32:8–9.” (Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*.).

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-13 ESV).

Before we go on further into the issues of spiritual warfare and spiritual authority, let's look at the Lord's Prayer as a model for the way we are to pray and be in this world.

But, behind the Lord's Prayer, is the assumption of pursuing intimacy with God. So, we will look briefly at the key of intimacy with God. Authority flows from intimacy. Then,

we will look at some principles of prayer that we find as we consider what Jesus taught through the Lord's Prayer.

The Key of Intimacy with God

1. **Christianity is about relationship with the Living God.**
 - a. *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9).*
 - b. *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).*
 - c. You were created to be the temple in which the Lord dwells by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). God wants to be at home in you.
2. **What is the Spirit of God saying today?** Return to your first love (Revelation 2:1-7). God is stressing that Christianity is an issue of relationship, not religion. Moreover, God is doing a wonderful thing in our day. He is boiling down the definition of Christianity to its simple essence: the essence of Christianity is pure and simple devotion to Jesus (Matthew 6:33, 22:37-39; John 17:26; 2 Corinthians 11:3).
3. **Practicing spiritual disciplines relationally is a way to fuel a life-giving relationship with the Lord.**
 - a. Spiritual disciplines remove the illusion that God is absent.
 - b. *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:7-9).*
4. **Everything we do must flow from the place of intimacy with God.**
 - a. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 15:5. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*
 - b. *The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and by what we do for him (Romans 12:3, TMSG).*
 - c. Apart from Jesus, you and I can do nothing (John 15:5).
5. The reality is that Christians throughout history have gotten so busy doing ministry that they have forgotten and neglected the Lord. **We are prone to leaving our first love** (Revelation 2:1-7).
 - a. Listen to the description of these believers.
 - i. They worked hard for the Lord.

- ii. They refused to quit (perseverance).
 - iii. They stood for truth and believed sound doctrine.
 - iv. They were persistent, courageous for Christ, and never wore out.
- b. They sound like a great group of believers: hard workers, perseverant, Bible-based, overcomers.
- c. However, they had walked away from their first love. They had fallen a great distance from the heart of Christ.
- d. It is possible to be so busy about the work of ministry that we neglect the Lord of the work. That is what happened to the people at the church in Ephesus.
6. **But God desires an intimate relationship with us first, above all else we do in ministry.**
- a. You and I were created for fellowship with God (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- b. **The desire of God is to dwell with us.**
- i. It started that way in the Garden, with deep fellowship (Genesis 2:8 - 3:8). God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden.
 - ii. And, it will end that way according to Revelation.
 - (1) *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:3).*
 - (2) It is our destiny for eternity (Revelation 21:3-4).
- c. **You and I were created to be a living tabernacle for God, a place where God dwells and makes his home in us** (John 14:20, 15:5; Ephesians 2:21-22)
- i. *On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you (John 14:20).*
 - ii. Remember that the word "abide" in John 15:5 is an experiential word.
 - (1) It is more than simply doing a Quiet Time or having devotionals.
 - (2) We are called to abide in Christ and to experience the presence of the Living God in our lives.
 - iii. *"I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. 2 He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. 3 You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. 4 Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. 5 "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing" (John 15:5, TMSG).*
- d. **The foundation for everything we do is intimacy with the Lord (Matthew 22:37-39), just as it was for Jesus (Luke 5:16-17).**

- i. Remember: the Great Commandment is Matthew 22:37-39, not Matthew 28:18-20.
- ii. You and I were called to get next to and to follow *a person* (Matthew 4:19). *"Come follow me,"* Jesus said.
- iii. Jesus prayed for our intimacy with him and his father (John 17:20-21).
(1) ... *Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:21).*
- e. **We must be intentional about maintaining our intimacy with the Lord, or we will burn out, drop out, give up, or become overwhelmed.** Remember: throughout history God's people tend toward leaving their first love (Revelation 2:1-11).
- f. We must be intentional about becoming conformed the image of Christ and letting him live through us (Romans 8:28-29). We let Christ express his nature through us.
- g. Jesus is the living water which people need, and he wants to flow through you. (See John 7:37-39.) **So nurture your relationship with him to keep those springs flowing.**
- h. **Love never fails** (1 Corinthians 13:8).
 - i. Duty, discipline, and devotion will fail, but not love.

The Discipline of Prayer

1. **We must be intentional about prayer. How do we expect to have the spirituality of Jesus without practicing his disciplines?**
 - a. *Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed* (Luke 5:16).
 - b. After watching the life of Jesus, the disciples understood that intimacy with God through prayer was the cornerstone value of the life of Jesus. So, the one thing that they asked of Jesus was that he would teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1).
 - c. Jesus ever lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus is still intentional about prayer.
2. **Intercession is an invitation to partner with God.**
 - a. **Why intercede?**
 - i. Because God hears our prayers and answers us with awesome deeds (read Psalm 65).
 - b. **God has chosen to work through the prayers of his people.**
 - i. Steve Meeks: "God has willed the working of his Spirit to follow the prayers of his people." Think about that!
 - ii. Without intercession, judgment comes.
 - (1) Read Ezekiel 22:30-31.
 - (2) *Isaiah 64:4-7 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.... 7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.*
 - c. Prayer is not primarily about changing God's mind or getting him to do something for us. Prayer is about connecting with God, cooperating with God, and giving God room to change us (2 Corinthians 3:18).
 - d. In it's simplest definition, prayer is talking with and listening to God.

Some Principles of Prayer

1. **Here is an analogy that is helpful for understanding prayer: *The Divine Dance***
 - a. **The Process:**
 - i. ***The Divine Initiative***: God issues an invitation. He takes the initiative. (See Matthew 4:19 or Isaiah 55:1-3.)
 - ii. ***Human Response***: God looks for a proper and faithful response to his initiative toward us (John 1:12; 2 Chronicles 16:9).
 - iii. ***Divine Response to Human Response***: We have a living hope that God has called us into relationship with himself, that he wants interaction with us, and that God responds and comes to the aid of those who seek him (Isaiah 57:15).
 - b. **Illustration: Matthew 11:28-30**
 - i. Initiative / Invitation: *Come to me, all who are weary.*
 - ii. Response: We come to Jesus.
 - iii. Divine Response to Human Response: *I will give you rest... you will find rest [in me].*
 - c. **Invitation**: Let's respond to the what the Lord is saying today.
 - i. Divine Initiative / Invitation: The Lord invites us to pray and teaches us to prayer.
 - ii. Human response: Our part is to pray.
 - iii. Divine response to human response: God meets with us, changes us, and answers prayer.
2. **Some General Principles of Prayer**
 - a. From Matthew 6:5-8 (*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 11-12)
 - i. *"Acceptable prayer depends on the motivations of our heart in God's sight, in contrast with the outward form of prayer in the sight of others."*
 - ii. *"Acceptable prayer is simple and straightforward, not complicated or unattainable."*
 - iii. *"Acceptable prayer does not inform God of anything, but instead forms us spiritually. Prayer produces enormous changes, especially in us."*
 - b. **Sometimes, it is helpful to remind yourself and the Lord about his promises.** In those times when my prayer life is dry and dull, I turn to the Scriptures, especially to Hebrews 11:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. Those verses remind me that meeting with the Lord is not in vain. God rewards those who seek him. And, even weak, frail efforts can result in transformation in my life.
 - i. *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).*
 - ii. *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

- c. **Sometimes, it is helpful to use a pattern for prayer.** Sometimes we need a track to run on, to help us connect with the Lord and to pray according to his will.
 - i. Use the Lord's Prayer as a model for prayer.
 - ii. Pray the Psalms.
 - iii. Use a devotional prayer guide or book.
- d. **Sometimes, we need help with our prayer vocabulary.** We don't pray because we don't know how to pray or what to say. That is why we want the Lord and to his prayer life to teach us to pray. Praying through the Scriptures or Apostolic Prayers is another way to grow in your prayer language.

3. Models of Prayer

- a. There are different models of prayer: Intercession, Petition, ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication), The Lord's Prayer, Prophetic Prayer, Contemplative Prayer, Praying the Scriptures, Identificational Prayer, etc.
- b. The point is simply this: **Pray.**
- c. **Keep it simple:** Just come to God as you are and pour out your heart to God. Just draw near to God. Just pray. You don't have to be good at prayer, because the Holy Spirit interprets our prayers and the Father understands his children. Just pray.
- d. Jesus said, "*When you pray...*" (Matthew 6:5). It is assumed that this discipline of prayer is one of the foundational spiritual practices for followers of Jesus.

4. Use all kind of prayers and just pray

- a. *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (1 Timothy 2:1).*
- b. *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 6:18).*

- 5. By the way, **you learn to pray by praying.** Yes, we need to be taught and equipped. But, all the best teaching on prayer is useless unless you actually open your mouth and pray.

6. Important Aspects (principles) of Prayer (lessons I have learned)

- a. **Focus:** What is the focus of your prayers?
 - i. Worship helps focus your prayer on a person, the Living God.
 - ii. Focus requires that we learn how to take captive our thoughts. If your mind is running wild, it is hard to focus and pray.
 - iii. Find a place and time that helps you to focus.
- b. **Personal / Relational:** in prayer we meet with the living God ("our Father").
 - i. Prayer is about talking with and meeting with God (Psalm 27:4, 8).
 - ii. Prayer is relational; God is not just a vending machine.

- iii. We seek his face, not just his hand.
- c. **Faith:** (Hebrews 11:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18)
 - i. We must believe that God answers prayer, that he rewards those who seek him.
 - ii. Prayer changes us, informs us, and recalibrates us.
 - iii. Prayer plays an important part in unleashing the purposes of God on the earth (Revelation 8:1f) and in your spheres of influence. So, prayer is important.
- d. **Listening:** have a heart that is attentive, attuned, and available (responsive).
 - i. Prayer involves talking, listening and responding.
 - ii. We need to cultivate an attentive, available spirit. So, pay attention.
Throughout the day, turn your heart to the Lord in love and surrender.
 - iii. We listen and pay attention in order to respond to what the Lord is saying and doing (Mark 4:24 “consider carefully what you hear”; Luke 8:18 “consider carefully how you listen [hear]”).
 - iv. We listen in order to discern and to determine what the will of God is in any given circumstance or situation (*thy kingdom come...*).
 - v. It takes intentional effort and practice to be a good listener.
 - vi. Carry a listening heart with you throughout the day. Attune your heart to the Lord.
 - (1) Learn to listen to the Lord in the secret place; learn to attend to the Lord in your prayer closet.
 - (2) Then, you will carry that same capacity into the marketplace.
 - (3) Open your spirit to the Lord.
 - (4) Practical matter: Keep a piece of paper or a voice recorder with you, to record what the Lord is saying to you or showing you.
- e. **Interdisciplinary:** other spiritual disciplines help our prayer life.
 - i. For example, spending time in the word helps us to pray according to God’s will, according to his promises and purposes.
 - ii. Spending time in silence and solitude helps us to focus and learn what the voice of God sounds like.
 - iii. Worship helps focus our hearts and heads.
- f. **Team Work:**
 - i. In addition to your own personal prayer life, try praying with others.
 - ii. Praying with others will stimulate, encourage, and equip your prayer life.
 - iii. **Motivation and mutual support: Sometimes, I don’t feel like praying. But, being on a team or in a partnership of prayer helps hold me accountable and motivates me to stay faithful.**
 - iv. Think about joining a corporate time of intercession, getting with a prayer partner, or praying with a family member.
- g. **Variety:** Scripture teaches that there are all kinds of ways to pray.
 - i. Different prayers fit different seasons of life and different circumstances (praying as you drive, for instance; prayerwalking).

- ii. There are short prayer times, long prayer times, and even longer prayer times (like a retreat or something), etc.
 - iii. Use different prayer guides, books, or the Scripture to help give your prayer life vitality and vocabulary (like the *Seek God for the City* booklets which we use during the Easter Season).
 - iv. Express prayer in different ways: silently, out loud, as you work, etc.
 - v. Find a place to pray. This is very helpful.
 - vi. Use different postures for prayer: walk, sit, stand, sing your prayers.
 - vii. Pray the word of God, especially the Psalms and the Apostolic Prayers of the New Testament.
 - viii. Pray about the things God lays on your heart.
- h. Transition: In this teaching, we will look at one model of prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The **Model Prayer** (Lord's Prayer) is a way to pray according to the will of God. You don't always have to pray through every part of the Lord's Prayer. Sometimes, you will simply pray the Model Prayer itself. Sometimes, you will use each part of the Model Prayer as a launching pad for prayer. Sometimes, you will focus on one part or another.
- i. **Promise: Using the Lord's Prayer will inform, inspire, and impact your prayer life.**
7. **How to Pray** (Matthew 6:9-13 KJV / NIV)
- a. **Worship:** *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*
 - i. *Our Father:* Think about who you are addressing. Our God is near, immanent, present. Our identity is in God.
 - ii. *In heaven:* Our God is transcendent, all powerful, and beyond us.
 - (1) **Perspective:** The center of the universe is where our Father rules and from where he does his will.
 - (2) We get to come near to our Father, above every power and force in heaven and on earth.
 - (3) When we come near to God, we come to our Father.
 - (4) In his presence, we worship and respond to his beauty, majesty, and greatness.
 - (5) Coming to the throne of God causes everything else to fall into its proper place and gives us proper perspective (Matthew 6:33).
 - iii. *Hallowed be your name:*
 - (1) We exalt you as holy and respond humbly to you.
 - (2) We seek to spread the fame of your name in the earth. We declare who God is and what he has done.
 - (a) Isaiah 66:19 "*I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations... and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.*"
 - b. **Welcome / Intercession:** *Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

- i. *Your kingdom come:* We welcome the Lord to rule and to reign on earth as in heaven. We invite him to rule and reign in every place: our home place, neighborhood place, work place, and other places.
 - ii. *Kingdom:* What it is like when God rules and reigns.
 - iii. *Will:* God has a will; he has desires. God has redemptive purposes and designs for every business, every school, every city, every nation, etc. Learn to pray into the plans, purposes, and promises of the Lord.
 - iv. Intercession is standing in the gap between the way things are and the way God wants them to be (Ezekiel 22:30).
 - v. It involves blessing and cooperating with what God is doing and wants to do.
- c. **Petition:** *Give us today our daily bread.*
- i. It is important to ask on a daily basis for what we need.
 - ii. God has the bread which we need (Luke 11:5-8).
 - iii. God knows how to parent us, how to give his kids good gifts (Matthew 7:9-11)
 - iv. We admit that we have need. **Acknowledging our dependence upon God honors the Lord and humbles us.**
 - v. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6).*
- d. **Confession of sin:** *Forgive us our debts,*
- i. We have all sinned and come short of the mark, God's glory.
 - ii. We can all experience and walk in forgiveness, in freedom from debt and slavery to sin.
 - iii. Read 1 John 1:9.
- e. **Forgiveness of others:** *As we forgive our debtors.*
- i. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).*
 - ii. Hardness of heart toward God or others keeps the love of God out and poisons our soul.
 - iii. Unless we forgive others, God will not forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15). Learning to forgive ourselves and others is a part of being conformed to the image of Christ.
 - iv. Forgiveness is a power spiritual weapon that disarms the enemy (Colossians 2:13-15).
- f. **Guidance:** *Lead us not into temptation*
- i. Lead us! We pray for God's guidance (Psalm 25:12).
 - ii. May we learn directly from God and not from exposure to tempting situations.
 - iii. Some people say that you have to learn the hard way. Some people say that they only learn when the pressure is on.
 - (1) There are other ways to learn rather than running into brick walls and falling into ditches.
 - (2) We can learn by seeking, listening to, and following wise, godly counsel.

- g. **Warfare:** *But deliver us from the evil one.*
 - i. There is a war and an adversary.
 - ii. God wants to show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are inclined toward him.
 - iii. Ephesians teaches us to believe right, live right, and fight right.
 - iv. Principles of warfare
 - (1) Wield the weapons of our warfare like the Word of God, forgiveness, love, righteousness, holy actions (see Isaiah 68).
 - (2) Stand in repentance: "we have sinned."
 - (3) Pray out of your authority in Christ (Luke 10:17-20).
 - (4) Appeal directly to God for his intervention, righteousness, mercy, etc.
 - (5) Boldly ask God to execute vengeance and judgment against his enemies.
 - (6) Proclaim the truth about Christ and his kingdom.
 - (7) Declare the reality that all powers and principalities are subject to Christ and will bow before Jesus (Psalm 29:1-2; Psalm 86:8-10; Psalm 97:7; Colossians 1:13-18; Philippians 2:10-11; Hebrews 1:6).
 - (8) Use the principle of replacement, praying for the opposite of the work of the enemy and brokenness which you see.

- h. **Bold declaration:** *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (KJV).*
 - i. This is a bold prophetic declaration.
 - ii. It gives us perspective as we close our prayer and live in this broken world.
 - iii. It empowers our souls as we hear it and proclaim it.

8. Application

- a. **Prayer requires availability and intentionality.**
 - i. Make for times of prayer.
 - ii. Learn to refocus on God and to listen to him throughout the day.

- b. **Let's respond to the what the Lord is saying today.**
 - i. Divine Initiative / Invitation: The Lord invites us to pray and teaches us to pray.
 - ii. Human response: Our part is to pray.
 - iii. Divine response to human response: God meets with us, changes us, and answers prayer.

9. Reflection

- a. What gets stirred up in you as you think deeply about prayer?

- b. What is the Lord asking you to get in action around?