

Recognizing and Defeating the Powers of Darkness

Why does spiritual darkness linger where it does? The author helps missionaries and Christians in general arrive at a biblical understanding of the modern spiritual battlefield and provides insights for fighting this war in global evangelization in response to demonic resistance and counterfeits.

by George Otis, Jr.

As human beings most of us want to know where we are at any given time. If we have not yet reached our destination at least we need to be assured that we are on the right path. Our ancestors gained this confidence by consulting natural reference points like mountains and stars. We are more likely, however, to rely on the ubiquitous “You-are-here” displays that adorn large airports, shopping malls and theme parks.

There is also a temporal aspect to our innate need to fix our bearings. As creatures of destiny, we long to know our position in time as well as in space. The difficulty in charting the fourth dimension is that hard reference points are visible in only one direction: the past. These historical markers, useful in measuring how far we have yet to come, are inadequate for determining how far we have yet to go. The sole solution is to identify the finish line, and the only way to do that is to journey into the future.

Despite our obvious limitations in this respect, most of us cannot help but wonder where we fit on the continuum of human and Church history. The fact that world affairs have suddenly become kaleidoscopic, fracturing and changing at every turn of the earth’s axis, only adds to our curiosity. Are the days in which we live a passing phase, or have we finally

reached the threshold of the “end times?”

It can be argued that every generation of believers has expected to witness the climax of history, but until now there has been a lack of objective evidence to support such expectations. In defining what has changed, contemporary Christians point to three developments:

1. A quantum leap in human knowledge that is unbridled by wisdom.
2. A rising tide of spiritual interest and supernatural activity.
3. The onset of “critical mass” in global evangelization.

While much can be said about each of these important developments, the prospect of completing the Great Commission is undoubtedly the most compelling. Powerful new technologies have not only allowed Christian evangelists to track our progress against Matthew 24:14, something no other generation of believers has been able to do, they have opened the door for long-reach mass evangelism.¹

Employing these tools, and backed by a growing army of committed prayer warriors, contemporary missions has begun to realize an unprecedented level of success. In the mid-1990s, Justin Long of the Global Evangelization Movement estimated that 114 people were coming to Christ

every minute—an evangelistic torrent that translates into a net gain of 44,000 new churches each year! During this same time period, the Lausanne Statistics Task Force reported that, for the first time in history, the ratio of nonbelievers to biblical Christians had fallen to less than seven to one (compared to 220 to one in A.D. 100).²

The Latter Rounds

In the midst of all this good news, however, comes what radio commentator Paul Harvey would call “the rest of the story.” In most escalating ventures (business negotiations, political campaigns, athletic tournaments), the stakes tend to rise in proportion to our position. The closer we are to the end of the process, the higher the stakes. And since no stakes are higher than those associated with completing the Great Commission—an accomplishment Jesus prophesied would usher in the end of the age—today’s Christian warriors can expect to face challenges on the spiritual battlefield that are unique in both type and magnitude. This is the challenge of the latter rounds, and as they say in desperate times, this calls for desperate measures.

Accordingly, while the remaining task of world evangelization is getting

smaller, insofar as the number of unreached people groups is concerned, it is also becoming more difficult. In strategic areas like the 10/40 Window, intercessors and evangelists are finding themselves locked into the fight of their lives. Standing eyeball to eyeball with some of the most formidable spiritual forces on earth, these heroic ministers are reporting two substantial challenges to the continued expansion of God's Kingdom: *demonic entrenchment*, an obstacle resulting from an excess of time, and *demonic desperation*, an obstacle linked to a lack of time.

Demonic entrenchment is hardly unique; the Hebrews encountered it in Egypt and Babylon, and the apostle Paul found it in Ephesus. But now we are centuries deeper into history. There are places on earth, notably in Asia, where demonic pacts have been serviced continually since the great Dispersion.

Consider, too, the proposition that darkness now has a wider human base. As *Time* essayist Lance Morrow noted in June 1991, "If evil is a constant presence in the human soul, it is also true that there are more souls now than ever." Using this logic, Morrow reasoned that evil is rising on a Malthusian curve—or at least the same rate as the population, 1.7 percent per annum.

Demonic desperation, as we noted, is a problem associated with the lateness of the hour. In the book of Revelation, God warns the inhabitants of the earth that "the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12, NKJV). As much as these days distress us, they are even more disturbing for the powers of darkness. Confronted with growing incursions into their prayer-eroded strongholds, Satan's hordes are beginning to taste the same salty panic they have long

induced in human beings.

Facing the prospect of eternal ruin, the prince of this world has infected his domain with what Michael Green calls "an increasing tempo of chaos."⁴ Under the shadow of Satan's presence, earthly kingdoms have begun to shake like a terminal patient casting off the final vestiges of life, thereby validating Jesus' two-thousand-year-old prophecy that "the love of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). The enemy, determined to fill every seat in his hell-bound bus, has ordered a dramatic escalation of counterfeit signs and wonders. To protect against those who would probe or escape his snares,⁵ he has initiated a series of violent counterattacks.

These counterattacks are generally aimed at two kinds of targets: territories that have recently experienced a unique move of God, and individuals instrumental in conveying the Gospel to unreached peoples. Territorial counterattacks are usually accompanied by political persecution,⁶ while assaults on individuals include everything from relational breakdowns to physical illness and injury.

Battlefield Protection

While some Christians are content to explain such incidents of attack as the natural, if unfortunate, consequences of mundane forces, I find this attitude a form of denial. By minimizing the influence that spiritual powers have over human lives and habitats, these individuals hope to limit their vulnerability. If their view does not make them any safer, it at least makes them feel more modern.

The Scriptures, however, offer no such harbor. From Genesis to Revelation, we are reminded that activist Christian living is inextricably bound up with the spiritual world—a world that consists not of abstract forces or

laws, but of powerful and interested personalities. And because we are the focus of their interest, few happenings in ministry can truly be called coincidence.

Demonic powers have never been shy about getting in the way of God's servants. Satan, who stood as accuser at the right hand of Joshua (see Zechariah 3:1), is also on record as having afflicted Job with painful sores (see Job 2:7), tampered with Daniel's intercessory mail (see Daniel 10:12-13) and tried repeatedly to distract Jesus from His mission (see Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 4:1-3). The apostle Paul lamented to the Thessalonians, "We wanted to come to you, certainly I, Paul, did, again and again, but Satan stopped [hindered] us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Despite these examples, many Christians today hold the view that the enemy is best ignored. I can still remember the indignity of one Pentecostal man who approached me after I had concluded a teaching on spiritual warfare. Calling my accounts of demonic assaults on Christian workers "lurid," he asserted that Satan can only be empowered by such attention. The best approach to dealing with the enemy, he insisted, is to dismiss him.

But the apostle Peter seems to commend a different approach. "Be self-controlled and alert," he urges. "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. *Resist him* (1 Peter 5:8-9, emphasis added). James offers similar advice. After instructing believers in his brief epistle to submit themselves to God, he adds the proactive charge, "*Resist the devil*, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, emphasis added). Passive neglect, as these biblical writers well understood, is a poor tactic against an adversary who blatantly and frequently refuses to be ignored.

Surviving the enemy's gauntlet of snares, however, is not a task to be

taken lightly. As many well-meaning believers have learned (often too late), Satan is a cunning and relentless adversary, a devious wizard whose mastery of the dark arts enables him to fashion salacious temptations or fling fiery darts with equal ease. Nor are these devices directed solely at the weak and wayward. If the experiences of Job, Daniel and Paul tell us anything, it is that men and women are not invulnerable to trouble simply because their intentions and ministries please heaven. If Satan is audacious enough to tempt the Son of God and impede an angelic messenger dispatched by the Almighty, we can hardly expect him to steer clear of us!

Where, then, does this leave us? If spiritual invulnerability is an unattainable goal, can we not at least make ourselves more elusive targets? The answer is yes. While we cannot put on a magic suit or claim an exemption from battle, God's Word does present us with six tried-and-true steps that, if followed, promise added protection. Latter-day warriors should review them carefully.

Cultivate Humility

Scripture presents humility as a divine requirement (see Micah 6:8) and an endearing characteristic (see 2 Chronicles 33:12-13; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Peter 5:5-6). It is also a potent moral weapon in the battle against pride—a deceptive power that Francis Frangi-pane calls “the armor of darkness itself.”⁷

If God is drawn to humility, He abhors pride. From the moment this lethal and unholy poison bubbled out of the secret recesses of Lucifer's heart, it has brought nothing but pain to the heart of God. Of all the forces at work in the universe, none is more destructive or antithetical to heavenly principles. For this reason we are told

that “God opposes [or resists] the proud but gives grace to the humble.” This proverb, quoted twice in the New Testament,⁸ is linked contextually in both instances to spiritual warfare. And for good reason! If we want to resist the devil, we had better make sure God is not resisting us.⁹

Humility comes, as successful spiritual warriors have learned, from seeing God—and the devil too—for who they really are. One such warrior,

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the great reformer Martin Luther, preserved his insights on the subject in the words of the classic hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Speaking first of our adversary, Luther penned (in the original):

The old, evil Enemy is determined to get us; He makes his vicious plans With great might and cruel cunning; Nothing on earth is like him.

In the last line (later translated as “On earth is not his equal”), Luther rightly acknowledged Satan as a higher-dimensional being whose power and cunning on terms are unmatched.

However, after giving the devil his due Luther moved quickly to the other side of the equation:

But if the right man [Christ] is on our side, One little word shall fell him.

In this magnificently balanced theology, Luther acknowledged two important truths. First, Satan's power is such that we cannot defeat him in

our own strength-ever. Second, Christ's power is such that Satan cannot defeat Him in his own strength-ever. While there is an obvious strategy in these profound mismatches, it is visible only to the humble. Underestimating either of these supernatural combatants will lead to certain defeat.

Although some critics have accused the contemporary spiritual warfare movement of ignoring divine sovereignty, I have not observed this to be a serious problem. What I have found, at least among Western Christians, is a tendency toward unqualified triumphalism, a kind of swaggering religious play-acting that belittles the capabilities of the enemy and incites believers into battle without first ensuring that “the right man” is indeed on their side. To these believers,

the devil is little more than an abstract punching bag, an ethereal bogey man at whom they can hurl epithets and chant cliches.

Such bravado before the enemy, far from being a badge of experience, is a sure sign that these believers have never seen their reflection in his malignant, bloodshot eyes. Like a naive child toying with a cobra, they have no idea what (or whom) they are dealing with.

As the sons of Sceva discovered, cockiness has no place in spiritual warfare (see Acts 19:13-16). The devil's power is real and he is not afraid to use it. Fuller Seminary student Wilson Awasu relates that, in the West African country of Ghana, a pastor ignored the warnings of local villagers and ordered them to cut down a tree that had been enshrined by animist priests. When the last branch was lopped off, the minister collapsed and died. In a similar case, another well-meaning pastor commanded that a fetish shrine be demolished. When parishioners proceeded to carry out

his wishes, he was struck down by a debilitating stroke.¹⁰

One evening in Papua New Guinea, missionaries Jim and Jaki Parlier listened as a group of Managala boys fearfully described the consequences of violating the taboo against speaking the names of the deceased. “Sometimes,” the boys explained, “the [ancestral] spirit will just climb on your body. It feels heavy, like a huge log on our chest, and it’s hard to breathe.”

Hearing this, Jaki determined to teach the boys a lesson about superstition. Facing a grove of banana trees that concerned them, she yelled out the name of a powerful warrior spirit: “Ekileta, can you hear me? If you can, come and bite me. I’m waiting for you!”

The lads huddled together and covered their ears with their hands. Jaki, however, was just getting started. Feeling smug, she began calling out the name of every dead person she could think of, including an old sorceress named Avami. At this, the terrified boys started to cry. Jaki recalls:

“A few hours later, an eerie presence entered [our] room and woke me. Suddenly I felt a heaviness on my chest, like the weight of a huge log, pinning my body to the bed, I tried to wake Jim, but the weight was squeezing every ounce of breath from my body. I couldn’t move or speak. Finally, in one desperate attempt, I forced the words *the blood of Jesus*. The weight lifted immediately.”

Recoiling from her trauma, Jaki sat straight up in bed. Two red lights, like butterflies, were dancing in the middle of the room. After she rebuked them in the name of Jesus, the orbs flitted toward the window, slipped through gaps in the bamboo and danced into the night.¹¹ When it was over, two of God’s people had learned a hard lesson on the risks of spiritual

Walking in Obedience

The second ingredient for spiritual protection is obedience. Some may consider this requirement too general or simplistic to include in a list of practical advice. But the hard fact is, human presumption is among the most common attractors to the demonic.¹² In the arena of spiritual warfare, the devil is concerned less about the words cast in his direction than about who is doing the talking (see Acts 19:15). When it comes time to size up an adversary, he has one primary question: Does this person have an active relational link with God?

In Scripture, this link involves not only hearing but hearkening to the voice of the Lord. Whereas the former affords us knowledge of God’s will, the latter indicates that we intend to do it. The prophet Samuel declared that “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22), for one simple reason: With sacrifice, we decide what God will get; with obedience, we give God what He asks for.

Walking in obedience not only makes us safer by limiting enemy inroads into our lives; it also allows God to defend His own purposes. While this support does not prevent the devil from taking his best shot (witness Elijah, Mordecai and Paul), it does make us more difficult targets. God can also intervene on our behalf without our even knowing about it.¹³ When the Moabite king Balak endeavored to curse the Israelites through the sorcerer Balaam, God’s Spirit caused the well-known oracle to pronounce a blessing instead (see Numbers 23-24). In a contemporary episode, a young Nepali girl died in her sleep after eating food offered to idols (or demons; see I Corinthians 10:20-21) at a Hindu temple in Kathmandu. At that moment the Lord awakened her mother, a godly woman, with a

warning that the girl’s life was in imminent danger. Walking over to her daughter’s bed, she found the little body ice-cold and lifeless. Embracing the child like Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:21-22), she resisted the powers of darkness until the soul of her beloved was returned.¹⁴

Another remarkable case of God defending His own was related to me almost casually by Bhutanese pastor Dawa Sandrup.¹⁵ I had been visiting this high-perched Buddhist nation, officially known as Druk Yul (Land of the Thunder Dragon), for less than a week when we met at his modest apartment in Thimphu.

Having spent the previous four days in the company of a Buddhist astrologer, a “reincarnated” lama, and a *chod* master (whose daily practice was to visualize his dismembered body being fed to hungry demons),¹⁶ I was under a weight of oppression. Now, ushered into what Dawa called his prayer room, I took a seat on one of two facing cots. Despite the cold concrete floor, it was the first place I had visited in the country where the spiritual atmosphere felt clean. Looking into Dawa’s kind face, I asked him how he managed to cope with this intense spiritual pressure year in and year out.

“Actually,” he replied, “the devil has come to take my life many times. The pattern is almost always the same. I awake in the middle of the night with an overwhelming demonic presence in the room. It remains even when I turn on the light. The first stage is physical; I feel a strong binding or weight on my chest. Sometimes I can’t breathe. This is often followed by a psychological attack. The walls of my mind start closing in and thoughts become difficult to form. It’s like mental claustrophobia. The final phase of the attack—and I am usually on my knees at this point—is spiritual. Even though I pray through until dawn, it

seems no one is there to listen. The heavens are like brass.

"The Lord is so kind, however," Dawa continued. "He always sends a breakthrough. Sometimes as I pray in the Spirit, the room is suddenly flooded with divine peace and power. At other times He sends believers to minister to me. They knock on my door in the morning, saying, 'The Lord has sent us to help you.'"

Then Dawa pointed at something over my shoulder. "Do you see that?" Craning my neck around, I spied a walking cane hanging on a solitary nail in the wall. "The elderly man who came to my door with that stick traveled all the way from Himachal Pradesh in northern India. He walked over a thousand kilometers! His name is Sadhu Subhas. Prior to that moment, we had never met or corresponded. But he told me that two years earlier, in 1988, God had shown him a vision of Thimphu and instructed him to come here. Shortly afterward, as he prepared to leave, the Lord supernaturally revealed all the roads and mountain passes he was to take. He arrived at my house on the morning after one of the enemy's attacks. As I opened the front door, he said, 'The Lord sent me to pray for you.' 'The day before he came here, there was a heavy snowfall. The day he arrived it was calm. The evening before his departure, it snowed heavily again. On Monday morning, however, it once again cleared up. When I asked the Sadhu about this, he replied quietly, 'The Lord honors his people.'"

At this point in our conversation, Dawa reached under the mattress on his cot and pulled out a well-worn black leather prayer journal. For the next several minutes, with tears coursing down his cheeks, he read aloud from entries recorded during

the visits of other "ministering angels." The messages, which included words of prayer, encouragement and prophecy, were powerful. As they permeated the air around us, I realized that this tiny, nondescript room was no ordinary place. What had looked like a cold concrete floor now appeared as hallowed ground. I found the urge to kneel overwhelming.

Dawa's prayer room was a heavenly outpost on the edge of a vast supernatural battleground. That this Bhutanese pastor had held firm in the

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face of withering demonic attack was testimony to this steadfast obedience.

When finally I stood to leave, a faded wall-hanging caught my eye. Entitled "The Beacon Light of Faith," it bore words that could not have been more appropriate:

Faith is like a beacon light across a troubled sea,

A glow of hope that casts its rays wherever we may be;

And sometimes through the darkest night our hearts will find the way,

Following that light of faith into a brighter day.

Spiritual Armor

Given the amount of enemy flak in the air these days, it is astonishing

to find so many Christians going about without spiritual armor. When it comes to risky behavior, one can offer better odds to three-pack-a-day smokers, promiscuous fornicators or drivers who shun seatbelts.

The most common reason seems to be simple carelessness. People just do not think about putting on their spiritual armor. While the subject may have been fun in Sunday school, where it was presented in coloring papers and on flannel graph boards, the task of relating helmets, shields

and breastplates to the modern world has caused many adults, at least in practical terms, to abandon Paul's ancient metaphor.

Other Christians decline to don spiritual armor out of a misguided assumption that divine protection is a guaranteed byproduct of godly service. The problem here is not a lack of information but a display of machismo. Like the football player who shuns pads or the police officer who refuses a bulletproof vest, these individuals see themselves as indestructible warriors. The otherworldly nature of this battle is of little concern. As "King's Kids" they believe they automatically command all the power and protection heaven has to offer. In any ease, the devil smirks at their macho spirit.

In one graphic example in the early 1990s, a young, well-traveled missionary decided to engage the powers over the city of Kathmandu. Clambering up to a high point above the sacred Pashupatinath Temple complex, he proceeded to do battle with these potent spirits. Upon returning to his accommodations, however, he suddenly fell to the ground and lost control of his senses—an acute condition that lasted for three days. A week later,

after being examined by a local psychologist, he limped out of town like the sons of Sceva. Friends who fetched him at the airport in Singapore report that he was a basket case—broken physically, psychologically and spiritually. It took months to nurse him back to health.¹⁷

Sometimes it is not carelessness or machismo but a narrow theological worldview that relegates our spiritual armor to the closet. When Dr. Linda Williams signed on for short-term missionary work with World Medical Missions in 1984, she was assigned to The Evangelical Alliance Mission hospital in Taitung, Taiwan. Several days before a scheduled return flight to the United States, Williams and a colleague attended an idol parade associated with the local Lantern Festival. The idol-bearers wore exotic face paint and carried feathered fans. Celebrants, drunk and empowered by evil, swarmed the streets exploding firecrackers.

“Suddenly,” Williams recalls, “one of the temple leaders stepped from the parade line, waved his feathered fan in front of me and chanted angrily.” Confused, she turned to her colleague for an explanation. His eyes were popping. “He pronounced a curse on you,” he stammered. “He asked the devils to demonstrate their power to you within 48 hours.”

Two days later having dismissed this bizarre event from her mind, Dr. Williams headed off on a farewell beach trip with several friends, including a dear missionary couple, Art and Leona Dickinson. As their vehicle approached a curve, a dog darted onto the road, causing their Chinese-American driver to swerve instinctively. The vehicle careened into two large trees and flipped.

Coming to her senses, Dr. Williams found herself covered in broken glass. A warm oily substance was dripping onto the back of her neck.

“Suddenly,” she recalls, “I could hear Art calling, ‘Linda, Leona’s dying!’ It was then I realized the warm substance on the back of my neck was actually Leona’s blood.”

For the next several days, Leona’s life hung in the balance. She was comatose and fighting for every breath as surgeons worked to repair her lacerated organs and broken bones. When one of her pupils dilated suddenly, it became apparent that her brain stem was herniating. The head surgeon, unable to transport Leona to neurosurgical care in Taipei, assembled missionaries to announce that she was probably going to die that night.

Even in the face of this pessimistic report, Dr. Williams recalls,

The non-medical missionaries, teachers and pastors remained appallingly hopeful... They seemed to have identified, before I did, that the accident was the result of the curse placed on me. But they also believed 1 John 4:4 and claimed it for Leona: “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (NASB).

Despite sustaining a C4 vertebral fracture, a condition that should have resulted in quadriplegia, Leona recovered fully. Says Dr. Williams:

Today I no longer dismiss the reality of spiritual warfare. I have quit trying to fit [demonic power] into a philosophically neat compartment that will not disturb my Christian comfort zone or scientific rationale.¹⁸

As these testimonies remind us, spiritual armor is no optional accessory. Those who dismiss it do so at their peril. As to the question of what this armor is and how it is put on, Paul summed up the matter in four simple words: “I die every day” (1 Corinthians 15:31). It is Christ, he told the Galatians, who “lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

In practice, then, putting on the armor of God is synonymous with

daily surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Rather than visualize ancient and imaginary clothing, we simply dedicate our first conscious thoughts each morning to the will of our Master. Spiritual armor becomes lifestyle when, for the balance of the day, we choose to walk in the consciousness of His presence and purposes.¹⁹

Maintain Spiritual Accountability

Author Carol Shields once said, “There are chapters in every life which are seldom read and certainly not aloud.”²⁰ Although these secret chapters are sometimes journalized memories of past failures, they are more likely to concern ongoing difficulties we would prefer to handle on our own. This tendency, as Charles Kraft noted in *Christianity with Power*, is most common among Westerners who cherish individualism and independence. It is not a healthy habit. Kraft points out that, besides engendering and legitimizing self-centeredness, a go-it-alone mentality makes us “vulnerable to Satan in the deepest recesses of our being.”²¹

It is worth remembering that a viewpoint—our viewpoint—is only a view from a point. While we are entitled to our perspective on things, we must also be willing to admit that our view is limited. By habitually rejecting the counsel and insight of others, we become easy marks for the master deceiver.

Christian intercessors are also vulnerable to brief lapses of awareness known as *micro sleeps*. These episodes, triggered by extreme fatigue, can occur in prayer meetings, in the middle of conversations, even while we are driving. Although micro sleeps are brief, usually lasting no more than a few seconds, they are rich in hypnotic imagery—fleeting, undefined forms that serve as the building

blocks for hallucinations. The danger in these episodes, as UCLA Professor Ronald Siegel points out, is that “the fatigued brain can embroider these ambiguous forms with specific features.”²² Without adequate rest or a grounding support system (wise leaders and loving friends), long-haul intercessors can fall prey to false, even demonically inspired impressions.

As the pace of life and ministry continues to quicken around us, accountable relationships become increasingly important to our spiritual well-being. In a reference to this hour, the biblical writer said,²³

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage [or exhort] one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

In the end, the purpose of spiritual accountability is to establish guardrails to keep us out of trouble, and a safety tether in case we stumble into it. It is like hiking in a wilderness area at a national park. Maps and trail markers are provided, but recreationalists are also asked to sign in at a ranger station or trail head. Hikers are asked to indicate the number and names of people in their parties, a proposed itinerary and projected entry and exit dates.

Some outdoorsmen see this as an example of overbearing authority, just as certain believers chafe at the disciplines of spiritual accountability. But there are good reasons for requiring such information. Every year adventurers are incapacitated in the wilderness by broken bones, animal attacks and capricious weather. When these things happen—and who ever plans for them?—it is nice to know you are tethered for “deep rescues.” After all, wasn’t this why a priest entering the

Holy of Holies wore bells on his garment and a cord around his ankle?

Faithful Prayer Support

One thing that has amazed me in counseling spiritual assault victims over the years is how few believers bother to establish any form of personal prayer support. With the exception of a few pastors and front line missionaries, most of these individuals never even consider themselves eligible for such an arrangement. While understanding on this subject has improved in recent years, thanks in large part to books like C. Peter Wagner’s *Prayer Shield*, there are still far too many Christians flying solo.

Missionaries too concerned about persecution or deportation take conscious steps to muzzle their witness on the field, leading to the very result the enemy had in mind all along: the effective silencing of Jesus Christ’s primary voice on earth.

A practice I have found of immense benefit is giving my intercessors advance details about each sensitive mission or project I plan to pursue. If my agenda calls for research work, be it in the highlands of Tibet or the streets of New Orleans, I try to provide each member of my support team with a daily schedule of events, including travel, interviews and observational activities. Once the mission gets under way, the intercessors agree to keep a daily prayer journal, detailing how God led them to pray, while I maintain a daily trip report, detailing what actually happened. When I return from the field, we swap documents.

Invariably this post-trip review proves mutually rewarding. The intercessors discover why they were prompted to pray in a certain fashion or at a certain time, while I am grateful for their sensitivity and God’s watch care over my every move.

Taking Godly Risks

The final step in our spiritual protection program involves an activity many Christians overlook: taking godly risks. Although we generally assume risk is something we need to protect ourselves against, the real danger is often fond lurking in the status quo. In Jesus’ Parable of the Talents, for example, the servant who buried his master’s capital in a napkin for safekeeping was sternly rebuked for his actions. Why? He neglected to advance the master’s interests. To his self-centered mind, the potential for loss was of far greater concern than the failure to gain.²⁴ In the end, the steps this servant took to alleviate loss actually promoted it.

Things today are not much different. Parents who worry about their children’s safety or “proper” education respond by holding them back from front line Christian ministry. (All too often this decision backfires when the youngster is lost to some addiction or compromised by the cares of this life.) Missionaries too concerned about persecution or deportation take conscious steps to muzzle their witness on the field, leading to the very result the enemy had in mind all along: the effective silencing of Jesus Christ’s primary voice on earth.²⁵

Prayer warriors can also be impaired by excess caution. A good example surfaced during an extended prayer journey I led in the early 1990s. As our team neared the end of a three-week mission to the Hima-

layas, which included on-site intercession at multiple Hindu and Buddhist strongholds, several participants reported feeling oppressed and asked to remain in their hotel rooms. Of those who proceeded into the temples and monasteries, many spent considerable time looking over their shoulders. In the midst of this spiritual malaise, God reminded us of the time His presence had been conveyed into the Philistine temple at Ashdod. As the Ark of the Covenant was set next to the image of Dagon, the idol promptly collapsed and shattered (see 1 Samuel 5:1-5).

Although the presence of God no longer resides in a gilded ark, it *is* contained in our earthen vessels. Wherever it is conveyed, we may be sure that it will have a greater impact on its environment than its surroundings have on it.

As I pointed out in *The Last of the Giants*, God seldom calls His people to a fair fight. The recurring theme of Scripture is one of giants and multitudes. Time and again Christian warriors are asked to face foes whose natural resources exceed their own.²⁶ If we are to succeed on such battlefields, we must learn to walk in faith; and faith, it has been said, is spelled R-I-S-K. If something is not risky, it does not require faith.²⁷ And “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

“The risk-free life,” as the late Jamie Buckingham once said, “is a victory-free life. It means lifelong surrender to the mediocre. And that is the worst of all possible defeats.”²⁸

Going out on a limb not only takes us to where the fruit is, but it prevents us from being picked off by the enemy. As any marksman knows, there is nothing easier to hit than a stationary target.

Spiritual Power

There is more to Christianity than

becoming an elusive spiritual target. Our mission to extend the borders of Christ’s Kingdom on earth also requires us to be practiced in the art of offensive warfare. And while the truth of God’s Word is our ultimate weapon, it is often more effective when accompanied by demonstrations of divine power.

In Acts 8 we read that “when the [Samaritan] crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, *they all paid close attention to what he said*” (verse 6, emphasis added). Elaborating on this point, Bible scholar Jack Deere draws attention to Paul’s statement that “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20, NKJV). This miraculous power, according to Deere, “is more than temporary evidence of God’s kingdom—it is actually a characteristic of His kingdom.”²⁹

People are nearly always attracted more to indigenous power than to foreign dogma. Indeed, until Philip arrived in Samaria with great signs and miracles, “all the people, both high and low” (Acts 8:10) gave their attention to a powerful sorcerer named Simon. Christian success in the Roman world was also largely attributable to the ability of the believers to offer convincing evidence of the power of the faith over demons.

The modern appetite for spiritual power, whatever its source, is no less ravenous. We have only to look at the unprecedented popularity of paranormal television programming, the proliferation of New Age teaching and the revitalization of various indigenous religions. People want power, and the enemy is only too willing to oblige.

Since demonic signs and wonders will increase as we edge closer to the Second Coming of Christ, we face some critical questions: Are we prepared? Do we have the necessary battlefield experience to stand up to this expanding competition? For many

believers, including some in positions of ministry leadership, the answer is a resounding NO.

Examples of this dearth of experience are not hard to find. A recent episode of the popular television program *Unsolved Mysteries* featured a Midwestern family traumatized by a demonic infestation of their home. Unable to cope with a daily routine that included flickering lights, levitating dishes and appliances that switched on without warning, the distraught couple turned to a local pastor for comfort and advice. After observing the unsettling phenomena firsthand, the dismayed clergyman could only conclude, “There are just some things we are unable to understand.”

The problem, as one Native American believer told me in 1992, is that “many Christians are afraid to venture into situations more powerful than they are.” Having little firsthand experience with the supernatural, they are inclined to shy away from its mysteries.

Improving our Performance

Those who admit their lack, however, can improve their performance on the spiritual battlefield by following six basic steps:

1. *We must expose ourselves to real battlefields.* Many of us are committed to notions about spiritual warfare that we have never proven personally. Having confined ourselves to artificial worlds like academia (where spiritual “war games” are waged on paper) or charismania (where battles are fought in rallies), we are often left unprepared for the real thing. The only sure corrective is to venture out beyond our established comfort zones.

2. *We must find a qualified mentor.* The best way to learn how to wield spiritual power effectively is to grab onto the coattails of someone who has

gone to battle before.

3. *We must remain clean and humble vessels.* Only the righteous can lay claim to the promise of divine power. According to Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 1:15 and John 9:31, God will not even listen to the entreaties of sinners.

4. *We must remember the purpose of divine signs and wonders.* Although spiritual gifts are often associated with the personal welfare of Christians, the Bible teaches that divine power is manifest primarily to glorify God and to facilitate evangelism (see Mark 16:20; Acts 2:43; 1 Corinthians 14:22; Hebrews 2:3-4).

5. *We must release ourselves to God's sovereignty.* If we are truly yielded to the Lordship of Christ, we must allow Him to regain His voice in each circumstance that confronts us. This will require more patient listening on our part and fewer demanding formulas.

6. *We must develop a sense of expectation.* This is especially relevant for those of us who live in (or with) the rationalist ghettos of Western society. Although we may find it difficult to picture ourselves in the role of exorcist, seer or healer, this is how God has chosen to minister to our bound and broken world. If we do not expect the Holy Spirit to manifest His power through us, He probably won't.

Whatever posture we decide to adopt on the issue of spiritual power, it is important to note that our competition has already cast their lot. Almost anywhere you care to look, men and women are paying desperate prices to acquire and employ spiritual power.

At least one mission executive, Howard Brant of SIM USA (Society for International Ministries), has expressed open concern about these "spiritual forces of wickedness which stand opposed to the advance of the gospel and the spreading of God's

kingdom on earth." In a recent position paper on the subject, Brant declared:

We want our missionaries, our related churches, and all Christians everywhere to recognize that there are dark spiritual forces which have enormous power over entire clans, villages, towns, ethnic groups, and even over nations (Daniel 10:11-13). It is as we learn to take up the weapons of our warfare and attack these strongholds of wickedness that God's Spirit will be released to turn men and women to himself, bring salvation to the lost, and revive His church.³⁰

The lesson in this corner of the labyrinth is that spiritual power and protection are not only available to obedient Christians; they are core components in God's strategy to liberate enchanted communities. So long as we remain focused on this purpose (as opposed to self-aggrandizement), we may call on divine gifts and power without hesitation. This will become even more important as global evangelization prompts our desperate adversary to flood the world with demonic counterfeits.

End Notes

1. At the forefront of these technologies are video (the *Jesus Film*), shortwave radio and satellite television. Other new technologies (such as the Internet, personal computers and jet aircraft) have affected every evangelistic means from Bible translation to missionary mobilization and global networking.
 2. The Justin Long statistic (which is adjusted for defections), derives from a June 1996 telephone conversation with Brian Kooiman of Global Harvest Ministries; see also "World-scene," *Christianity Today*, November 9, 1992, p. 64.
 3. Lance Morrow, "Evil," *Time*, June 10, 1991, pp. 52-53.
 4. Michael Green, *Exposing the Prince of Darkness* (Ann Arbor: Vine, 1991), p. 97. A similar situation manifested itself in the last few decades before the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica. Mayan and Aztec priests, sensing the approaching end of their culture, called for an increase in human sac-
5. The Catholic Church, for example, has recorded a dramatic increase recently in the number of requests for exorcisms.
 6. Notable exceptions to this rule include South Korea, where God's work has been hindered primarily through disunity between various churches and their leaders; Argentina, where revival fires have been cooled by the moral failure of a leading pastor; and Germany, where great gains were set back by a highly publicized sex abuse case involving a pastoral team in Nurnberg (the trial of this godly couple was based on trumped-up charges).
 7. Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds* (Marion, Iowa: Advancing Church Publications, 1989), p. 7.
 8. Both apostles (see James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5) quote from Proverbs 3:34.
 9. Jesus declared to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil" (John 8:44). For individuals who prided themselves on their devotion to prevailing religious orthodoxy, it is hard to imagine a more stinging indictment. Like Lucifer, the Pharisees had become infatuated with themselves—their knowledge, their pomp, their position. By valuing such things, they (like many religious intellectuals) had become "ignorant of God's righteousness" (Romans 10:3, NKJV). Their "zeal [was] not according to knowledge" (verse 2, NKJV). They had missed the point that *godly beliefs should translate into godly character*.
 10. C. Peter Wagner, "Territorial Spirits and World Missions," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, July 1989, p. 286.
 11. Jaki Parlier, "Dabbling with the Enemy," *In Other Words*, Vol. 18, No. 6, September-October 1992, pp. 1-2.
 12. And procrastination! See James 4:17.
 13. Although God often limits or deflects the devil's barbs, as He did with Job and Daniel, there is evidence that, in special cases of martyrdom, He grants His servants supernatural grace (see Acts 7:55-60).
 14. In the autumn of 1993, I had the privilege of confirming this account through first-hand interviews with both mother and daughter, now a beautiful young lady.
 15. Although my original conversation

with Pastor Sandruip took place in Thimphu, Bhutan, there are reports he has since been deported from the country on account of his Nepalese ethnicity. Please pray for him and the church he has shepherded.

16. *Chod*, or the "Mystic Banquet," is viewed by its practitioners as a shortcut to enlightenment (a state that typically requires thousands of lifetimes to attain). After mastering advanced visualization techniques (a process that can itself take several years), the disciple sets out to empty himself of ego by "feeding" his dismembered body parts to demons. The ritual, nearly always conducted in private, is carried out at places like caves and cremation grounds where demons are believed to congregate. Upon arriving at the site, the practitioner goes into deep trance. A Daikini spirit conjured through visualization takes a scimitar and slices off the top of the head. The skullcap is then enlarged supernaturally for use as a serving container. For the next several hours, the practitioner's other organs and body parts are dismembered in the same manner and placed in the skullcap. Finally, when nothing remains of the corporeal entity, the practitioner invokes the roaming demons to feast on the severed parts by blowing on a (real) hollowed-out human thighbone. This is the most dangerous moment in the entire ritual. Those who have not prepared themselves sufficiently for this gruesome manifestation can (and do) die of fright. Many others succumb to a condition known as "religious madness." (I had occasion to meet one of these victims on the day after my visit to the *chod* master's private monastery in 1992).
17. From a January 1997 interview with Pete Beyer (now recovered and wiser), and two conversations with Phil and Bev Westbay, his Singapore hosts.
18. Linda Williams, "The Curse of the Devil Worshipper," *Physician*, May-June 1994, pp. 18-20.
19. But also, as Francis Frangipane has said, "We must take off sin before armor can be put on and protect us."
20. Carol Shields, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, "Quotable Quotes," March 1996.
21. Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Power* (Ann Arbor: Vine, 1989), pp. 32-33.
22. Ronald Siegel, *Fire in the Brain* (New

York: Plume, 1992), pp. 126-127, 122.

23. See also Hebrews 13:17.
24. See George Otis, Jr., *Last of the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1991), pp. 260-265.
25. Other Christians attend church not because they want to enhance their relationship with Christ, but because they are afraid of losing their salvation. In the end, however, they are rejected by the very One they thought they were serving (see Matthew 7:21-23).
26. Otis, *Giants*, p. 263.
27. Kraft, *Christianity*, p. 135.
28. Jamie Buckingham, "The Risk Factor," *Charisma & Christian Life*, January 1989, p. 106.
29. Jack Deere, "Why Does God Do Miracles?," *Charisma*, September 1992, pp. 26.
30. Howard Brant, "Toward an SIM Position on Power Encounter," SIM Position Paper, p. 7.

[Editor's note: This article was adapted with permission from chapter nine of Otis' new book *The Twilight Labyrinth*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1997.]

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