

Prayer as Warfare

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Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0:00] All right, good morning to everybody. Hope you're doing well. Good to be with you today.! And right now we're kind of in a section of this series where we're examining specific types of prayer that you see in Scripture.

So last week, Kirk really led us through what it looks like to use prayer as ministry. When we really join God in what He's doing and ministering to people.

And so those are prayers that look like provision or healing or discernment or favor and how we join in that and how we prepare ourselves to do it. And next week we're going to look at what contending prayer looks like.

What it really means to like stand in the gap on behalf of others. You can actually call and ask God to do and be what He said He will do and be in Scripture.

And so kind of excited about that. But here in between this week, we're going to take a look at this very specific kind of prayer that might be a little less familiar, but I would say is no less important.

[1:27] And it's kind of this little subsection that I'm going to classify as prayer as warfare. Now as we approach this subject, I'm going to start by just kind of acknowledging that there's a little bit of trepidation even going into it because frankly we just, we live in very charged times and increasingly uncivil times.

And so I know when I use a word like warfare or that we're going to do battle, it may already conjure up, hey, I got enough conflict in my life.

I don't really like the idea of more war, of doing battle. That doesn't feel like the peace of the Lord. And so it may conjure up a specific set of images or feelings and many of those are not good.

And I just kind of want to acknowledge that at the front. But I would also say that Jesus never shied away from the reality of what his people would face.

And he didn't leave us in the dark as to how prayer would be needed in this realm. And so before we kind of talk on this topic of what does it mean to use prayer as warfare, we really have to start with unpacking this key idea that you see all throughout scripture and it's simply this.

[2:47] We do have an enemy and that enemy seeks to do harm to us and to those we love. But it might not be who you think it is.

Many of you over the years have probably either read the series or seen the movies about the book, The Hunger Games. But for those of you that haven't, the books are really kind of set in this dystopian future for North America where what's happened is there's been this big civil war and now all of these outlying districts are kind of kept strictly under the control of this central capital.

And one of the ways that the capital maintains control over these districts in a way that yearly reminds them of their defeat, that they've been put under their heels by forcing their children from each of these districts to fight each other to death in this gladiator style event that's televised to the whole country.

And one of the themes that evolves in that book series as the story advances and the districts start to kind of unite together in this attempt to overthrow this oppressive force at the capital is this idea of remembering who the real enemy is.

Because even though everyone hates the oppression of the capital, when you're in the games, the only enemy you can see is the one right in front of you. And that's kind of the devilish genius of these games.

[4:25] Even if you have a common enemy, none of that seems important when somebody's throwing a spear at you. And what you remember is not that

real enemy far away.

You remember the person in front of you who hurt you or hurt your family and caused harm to the ones you love. But the main characters in this story start to realize over time that if they're going to pull this rebellion off, they have to start to wake up to the fact that while they've done real harm to each other, the real enemy isn't the one inside the arena.

The Bible actually wants you to know something similar about the world you've been born in. In Ephesians 6, it tells us this. It says, 1 Peter 5 tells us, Be sober-minded and be watchful because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. In John 10, we're told, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. You know, it's interesting that I heard an author say years ago, Jesus makes a point to tell us that, that the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.

[6:16] And then we kind of go about life assuming that he will never actually show up to steal and kill and destroy. And then Jesus also shows us how you start to resist these things.

In Luke 22, talking to one of his disciples, he tells him, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Part of the ministry of the followers of Jesus is to fight against that real enemy. But here's the thing. You can't fight a spiritual battle with a physical weapon.

And indeed, one of the things I think we're going to see today, one of the real dangers, if you're going to engage this enemy that Jesus says you have, and one of the real dangers in doing battle with that adversary, is not becoming like the adversary when you're fighting.

[7:35] avoiding the temptation to succumb to hate and violence and darkness and the ways of your own hands.

Because if you're not careful, you're going to use the ways of the enemy to try to defeat the enemy. And you cannot wield them. If you want to have victory like Jesus has victory, you have to fight like Jesus fights.

2 Corinthians, Scripture tells us, For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

One of the key ways you engage this threat, one of the key ways you come at it that Jesus has shown us without succumbing to the darkness itself, is through prayer.

And that's because prayer as warfare is a way for you to learn to trust the battle to God instead of your own hands. In that same segment in Ephesians, where it tells us we're not wrestling against flesh and blood, we're wrestling against spiritual strongholds, it goes on to tell you how you wrestle.

[9:03] And it gives you this imagery of using truth and faith. And it kind of equates them to, this is what your armor, and this is what your shield, and this is what your sword looks like.

If you're gonna stand, you're gonna stand in God's spirit. And then it caps off that section in Ephesians 6.18 by saying this. This is the last instruction he gives them.

Praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication prayer for all the saints.

So let's just cut straight to it. What would that look like practically? Like how do we take this out of some spiritual esoteric realm into what does it mean, what would it look like if I'm using prayer as warfare?

So let's use a very common area of life that I think people can really identify with, particularly after doing a baby celebration. And that's, I think one of the things that every parent can agree on is they have a desire for their children to be kept safe.

[10:16] And certainly physically safe, but also as you look out across their lives from the myriad of spiritual and mental attacks they're gonna encounter over the years, all the evil and damaging ideas and

philosophies that are gonna draw them away from life and draw them into sin and brokenness.

And obviously, there's some practical and wise steps you might wanna take. So look, I'm not telling you how to parent, right? But it is probably not a great idea to give a child unfettered access to the internet.

I mean, that really is in a lot of ways like giving a firearm to a toddler and just expecting them to figure it out. So you can certainly say that there are practical things like in some ways, restricting access to that thing, trying to keep it controlled and out of their life until your child can grow and learn and be taught about the dangers and how to use tools responsibly is really important.

But the truth is, if all you give your time to and all you give your thought to and all you give your energy to is how do I keep danger away, you're not gonna be successful.

And really for two reasons. First, because let's just be blunt, you cannot plow the road of all danger. You cannot control everything they will be exposed to and everything they might run into the world and every friend they might have and everything they might run into in school.

[11:54] And if you aren't careful, control will become the only way you know how to fight. I gotta control it because I gotta keep them safe.

And if you go down that road, let me just tell you, either it's going to break you or you're going to break a lot of other people in trying to control everything. But secondly, if you go that way, it could actually even mean you're not even addressing the primary threat.

C.S. Lewis, years ago, wrote this work called The Screwtape Letters. And in it, he tries to describe these imaginary conversations between a senior demon and a lesser demon and how they're gonna go about ruining someone's life.

And although it's a work of fiction, what he's trying to do is give an illustration from his understanding of the scriptures and from just what he had observed in life, all of the subtle and subversive ways that the enemy tries to ruin lives.

And what you see him flesh out is these conversations don't look like hitting someone over the head with a shovel. They don't look like appearing with something super scary or terrifying.

[13:18] What you see is things that are suggestive and manipulative. Things that prey on physical weakness and emotional longing.

Things that want you to be distracted, maybe not even aware that there's something out there trying to do that to you. And your kids are certainly gonna get attacked like that too.

So what else could I do then other than the practical? Why would I offer to you you could pray? What might that look like? Well, you could just pray like Jesse showed us in the Lord's Prayer a few weeks ago that they would be kept from the hour of temptation.

that you can actually pray over your children that Lord let them be preserved from the hour of temptation.

Maybe instead of obsessing over the whole world and trying to make sure that nothing bad ever shows up, you could say, Jesus, when something bad does show up, protect their hearts and minds from what it could do to them.

[14:36] You can pray that the spirit will be close. I could ask that, God, when my kids are inevitably exposed to something that's disturbing or the first time they see something sexually explicit, that your spirit will be there to keep that from getting into their soul in a way that hurts them worse.

That you will be there to whisper the things of God in their ear when the world wants to whisper the things of the devil. Maybe you pray, God, when my child eventually is in a situation that peer pressure is gonna ramp up for them to do something wrong, God, may your spirit be there with them to pull them in a different direction.

Or maybe, God, when there's peer pressure ramping up to do something, maybe you'll put a good friend close at hand that will encourage them in a different direction. I could ask Jesus, could you simply give them the grace to discern the difference between the truth and a lie?

Maybe bring to mind by your spirit a scripture in a timely manner that just reminds them of who you are. You could pray some of that armor over them and you can even get creative with that. You can pray that God would protect them. Maybe you can even pray specific things. I've found over the years I actually like to pray things like generational blessings, right?

[16:16] And I'm not trying to be, again, too out there for you, but you might have noticed in your family legacy there are just things that God has been gracious to your family. There are giftings, there are things that he's given you in special abundance.

You can pray, God, may the grace that has been given to me, may the grace that has been given to my spouse pass to them. I could ask, Jesus, simply don't let the evil one have access to them in the way he wants to.

We're gonna talk a little more about this later, how this really isn't a fair fight, but you know, you can actually pray for that, right? It's not just a foregone conclusion, and as Kirk kind of talked about last week, I can't tell you exactly where God's hand and your interface in this links up, but I can tell you it matters when you pray, and so, if you're thinking about and worried about this spiritual enemy having access to my children, you can actually call to God and say, did you know in the scripture, have you ever seen that term, the Lord God of hosts?

Ever seen him called that? I think that loses a little bit in modern anguish. That means the Lord of all the manifest hosts in the heavenly realm.

Maybe to make a little sharper for us, that's literally saying you can call to the God of angel armies and say, God, please put at the defense of my house and my family and my children the unfathomable breadth of the host of your kingdom that they will not have access to my children.

[18:13] And if you do that, now you're not just trusting in yourself.

It's not the whole weight of the world of you to do the protecting.

You're trusting that God, that's what prayer is.

It is trusting, it is releasing it to your father. It is declaring, I am not strong enough or good enough or wise enough, but God, you are.

It's placing your trust somewhere over than yourself, which also will mean, incidentally, that prayer is warfare as a way for you to resist giving into fear.

So look, when we, when we talk about having a spiritual enemy, I think there's a couple bad ways we can approach this. One of them is to over-obsess about this and I certainly think there's a corner of our society that is obsessed with spiritual darkness and Satan and demons in a really bad way where you see the hand of the devil in everything from every minor inconvenience, you equate every mental health issue to something of the devil.

You see it in every action, in UFOs and everything else, right? And there is nothing in Scripture that suggests to you part of what you should do is to try to pierce and peer deeply into the dark things of the world.

[19:46] God does not, like getting a PhD in demonology, I don't, I just don't really see anything in Scripture that says spend a lot of time thinking about dark and twisted and grotesque things.

But certainly there's another way of approaching it that's equally and helpful that's basically the head in the sand approach. It's really that thing that just says look, this is creepy and it's scary and I don't want to talk about it and I'm just not going to think about it.

but trying to put your head in the sand is not going to serve you well either. Like it's not going to prevent you from getting attacked and not to get all Aragorn on you this morning here but this war is upon you whether you want it or not.

Can I also just say kind of modern special issue, it's interesting that I think sometimes we talk about something like this where we're somewhat more reticent to approach it because for some reason it seems just farther out there it seems a little too woo a little less respectable like I don't have any problem being a Christian and talking about Jesus but when we start talking about angels and demons it just seems a little weird and again I'm not trying to, I've said this before and I'm not trying to make you feel any certain way here but just put it out there you believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead you're a kook okay there's nothing you can't save respectability in high society or secular society now hear me I didn't say anti-intellectual because I find that God loves your mind he loves you to use it and some of the most thoughtful and profound and intellectual men and women I have ever read or met are followers of Jesus it does not mean that you eschew like the natural world is amazing and matters but you don't have to feel shy about this because Jesus talks about it so he says what God is calling you to is to neither obsess about this nor fall into a pattern of fear where you just don't want to talk about it because while the scripture never tries to sugarcoat the fact that Satan and spiritual darkness are real and they really want to hurt you it also affirms over

and over and over the Lord is faithful and he is greater than the enemy you face 2 Thessalonians 3
3 says but the Lord is faithful he will establish you and guard you against the evil one

[22:56] I'm safe James 4 7 submit yourselves therefore to God resist the devil and he will flee from you God can make him flee Kirk kind of touched on this last week I think sometimes we have this image again pop culture of like there's sort of some equality of weight between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God right but when you see Jesus encounter demonic or evil spiritual things in scripture there's never any battle there's just not a battle it's Jesus shows up he recognizes it and he says gone and they're like out Romans it tells us no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for

I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor any powers not height not depth not anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord you know what that means it's like an image it's like an image of you being held in the nail scarred hand of Jesus and him it's like declaring you want to separate me from Jesus good luck Colossians one says he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son God is greater and that means you do not have to be afraid of spiritual enemies you do not have to be afraid to talk about it you do not have to be afraid to pray against it you know when you engage the father and again back to the Lord's prayer when you pray thy kingdom come thy will be done here on earth as it is in heaven you are inviting the reality of God's kingdom into this moment it's really like declaring I mean again we have a lot of questions about why God allows what he does and why the world is still broken but one of the key things that God is trying to show us in prayer is wherever God's kingdom is things are right like they're how they're supposed to be and we know the world's not fully like that right now but what God is saying is I'm in the process of doing that and I'm inviting you if humans by their fear like it's a creature that has been created by an alien race to track humans it can't see but it can sense your physiological response when you are afraid and so the humans that have learned to fight against it have learned through discipline and controlling this fear kind of essentially this art of how to be invisible to this creature

I know it sounds really cool it's not it's really a terrible movie I don't I don't think I would waste your time with it but it does it really has this one really good line in there right which is actually on the movie poster so again you can skip the whole movie and get this one thing where the father tells his son when he's going to have to go face this thing!

He says look here's the deal danger is very real but fear is a choice you make part of what prayer is warfare does is it teaches you to engage the fact that there is danger there is a very real enemy that wants to hurt you but to remind you that you don't have to do that in fear and for the father of Jesus that's not done through some Buddhist like discipline where you strive to detach yourself from your emotions or gain maximum control of yourself for the father of Jesus you can engage the fear because while the dangers are real when you pray against them you're testifying safe in my father's arms not scared of you because my father's got me and that kingdom is unshakable finally prayer is warfare can stir us to compassion and teach us to love like our savior loves again

[28:49] Kirk talked a little bit about this last week about how we have to prepare our hearts if we go in with our father and I know we've said this before but I'm going to keep putting it out there because I think it's important to remember everything about the current information ecosystem we live in is designed to keep you stirred up because anger is more profitable than peace it is designed to stir you up to hate the reason we have terms like internet trolls is because that's exactly what they are they're they're elements out there that their whole intent is to poke you to constantly show you images and snippets and pieces of the truth that make you want to hate other people I can't tell you and I'm not just talking about you how many times each week

I encounter something I'm not immune to this where you watch that clip and what you if you're honest what you feel is I want to see that person punched in their stupid face I want to see them get what's coming to them and I get it there are real evils in the world that that our souls are indignant about and we want to see end as they continue what do we do with that Jesus has something to

say about it Matthew 5 he says you have heard it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven well Jesus what does it look like to be a son of our father in heaven he tells us that father for he the father makes his son rise on the evil and the good he sends rain on the just and on the unjust father is out there just sending common grace on people doing good and people doing evil because

Jesus says if you love those who love you what reward do you have do not even the tax collectors do the same you know he's not specifically just picking on tax collectors there's other parables where he uses tax collectors to show people how far they are from God but he picks that because it's a particularly explosive term you know we've talked about this before it's not just tax collector bureaucrat it's collaborator with Rome turncoat and Jesus is saying think about the worst possible group of people in your mind that you can they love each other they do good to each other and if you greet only your brothers what more are you doing than others do not even Gentiles again another group that they thought were outside of God's love the worst category of people they could think about

Jesus says Gentiles do that same thing you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect now look frankly love your enemies is maybe the hardest thing Jesus asked you to is the kind of thing that sounds really lovely to write on something and gets really tricky when you put it into practice it sounds good on paper until Jesus asks you to actually bear and suffer what it means to do that remembering who the real enemy is can help you do that you know after the civil war there was certainly a large segment of those advising president lincoln that thought there really needed to be much harsher punishment and much harsher retribution for those who'd rebelled and that was understandable you know their position was hey look at what they've done to us and you keep talking about inviting them back in about becoming one country again there's even this kind of famous quote that's often associated to lincoln though like many things from that period you're not really sure he said it but

I certainly think you could see the sentiment in a lot of his actions and it was that whenever he was rebuked for kind of his conciliatory attitude towards the south and many who felt that no you have to destroy them you have to tear this thing out root and stem to which lincoln would reply don't I destroy my enemies if I make them friends Jesus did not come in the flesh to destroy this world he came to seek and to save the lost and if you want to join him if you want to be with him in that mission you have to realize who the real enemy is your purpose here is not to destroy the wicked you are sent by the savior to join him in a rescue mission make no mistake it is a battle and it might cost you your life i mean think about this again since we're kind of in the military motif this morning which mission is harder there's a building full of bad guys i'm gonna blow it up and kill them all or there's a building full of bad guys and people i'm gonna rescue and i have to go into the danger to get them out without hurting them that second mission is a lot more dangerous and you really have to reckon with that that's jesus says if you're gonna join me we're going to remember who the real enemy is how can anyone do that again might sound good might sound challenging i'll be honest this it would not surprise me if some part of you is like nah i don't think so or but what about or like i got it or also that seems like it's much more dangerous to me yeah it is how can anyone do that who could teach you to do that jesus helps us again and i frankly don't know how to pray like this other than jesus gives you praise to pray like this because when we look to the savior we see a man who as he's being nailed to a cross remembers who the real enemy is he he looks out on the ones who are doing that to him the ones that are causing him ruin and what was his prayer father forgive them because they have no idea what they're doing they don't know who they're in league with jesus is the only one i know that can teach you to do battle like that you can try to take it up with discipline or philosophy but much like any battle you know when the first time you get shot or punched in the face all that goes out the window it sounds good until someone actually does real harm to you or your family or your city or your country and then it's well let's wipe them out only

[37:45] Jesus can teach you to pray like that but if you can learn it you can actually step into that battle in a way that matters not just for your family but for the mission he sent us in the world to do as the band comes up a couple of ways we can respond if you're here today and you're not a father of Jesus man what a Sunday to show up right it probably confirmed everything you thought about church angels and demons and I don't know if I can fix that for you but I would simply trust to this

truth that even if you don't believe in all that I would imagine if you're searching at all you would acknowledge with me that something in this world feels broken something doesn't feel right and again maybe you don't know me but

I can tell you as a man that's frankly spent a lot of my adult life studying philosophies and religion and science and thought patterns simply naturalistic explanations for everything we face in the human experience feel lacking to me it's one of the things about if you are ever called to minister or called to be a pastor like you see a lot of really dark things that I don't think is just the human experience so the bible wants to warn you that if you're here without him you do have an enemy and God tells you in the scripture we read that that enemy is roaming around seeking whom he may devour Satan would destroy God if he could but he can't and so he seeks to ruin his image bearers the people that God loves and let me just say to you this this isn't a place to try to be cheeky I'm going to take on that old devil you know it's going to be the devil goes down to Georgia I'm just going to out duel him you're not you are not a match for him he will woo you with a promise of fulfillment and freedom and you'll ultimately wind up in a cage I would say if you feel like you're in a cage today there is one way to be free and Kirk gave it to you last week when Jesus stood up and he started his time of ministry on earth the first passage he reads is that I have come to set captives free sin misery pain hurting others and being hurt by others and hurting others more and being hurt by others hell none of that has to be your destiny Jesus isn't repulsed by whatever you've done whatever you've become he's not shaking his head he just wants you to know you can come home he went to the cross so that you could come home if there's any piece of you that wants that just reach out to him there'll be a prayer on the screen maybe that's a way you can express it if you just want to come and talk to someone after we'd love to do that if you feel like you're in a cage

I kind of feel like that's what the spirit wants! if you are a follower of Jesus just remember who the real enemy is don't obsess about it don't go out here and buy all the books you can on demons it's not good but don't stick your head in the sand resist the urge to hate the ones Jesus died to save don't try to wield the tools of Satan to win the battle against Satan lift your eyes and your hands in prayer to the Lord God of hosts we wage battle in the power of the spirit can I just tell you it will give you faith it will change the perspective I can't see it

I can't touch it I can't feel it but I know when I stand over my kids at night and declare that this place belongs to Jesus it matters take some time and do some business with him and when you're ready you can come to the communion table take the elements back to your seat and remember friends of Jesus you are here you are a follower of Jesus because he did not see you as the enemy he saw you as his child to save and that meal this his body his blood testifies to that and it also testifies that that under the blood of Jesus you will be safe forever power of the devil doesn't want anything to do with

[43:32] Jesus you're safe God we give this moment to you God I pray that whatever evil thing holds sway over these people let it now depart in your name Lord I pray that you will embolden us and give us the grace to pray with you not in fear but in confidence of the father that you are making all things new your kingdom will come your will will be done in all the earth even so come Lord Jesus God