

10. Overcoming Evil with Prayer and Fasting.

Spiritual Warfare: Overcoming Evil

Link to the YouTube video subtitled in 70 languages: <https://youtu.be/RqYCLLKS-CQ>

In this series, we have frequently referred to the struggle that exists between darkness and light, between good and evil. There are those in society today who would like to deny the existence of evil and certainly any personification of evil. Yet, we see the clash between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Darkness growing stronger by the day. This battle is ongoing. When Jesus announced the Kingdom of God and brought the Light of the Kingdom, people were drawn to Him like bees to honey or a moth to light. They were drawn to His personhood; they were spiritually attracted to the light and freedom that the Kingdom of God brought, which Jesus personified. However, just as people were drawn to Him, others reacted in different ways. Religious spirits opposing Him worked through the leaders of the day, just as they do today, bringing accusations, attempting to discredit Him, and even branding Him a heretic. Demonic forces at work within individuals stirred and reacted, like magnetic poles of the same polarity that repel each other; Christ's words and presence repelled and angered His enemies.

As we conclude our final study on spiritual warfare, we remember that Jesus taught the disciples how to minister with power to heal the sick and cast out demons, sending them out in pairs to perform the works of the kingdom (Luke 9:1-6). At that early stage of their training, Christ was preparing and equipping them to continue His ministry when He returned to the Father. Christ's training of them as ministers progressed well until the following situation:

An Encounter with a Demonized Boy

When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration with three of His disciples, the other nine had faced a tragic situation involving a demonized boy. As Jesus approached the boy's father, he informed Christ of the nine disciples' inability to cast out the spirit in the boy. As we read, observe the reaction of Jesus at the end of the passage of Scripture to their lack of power and authority:

¹⁴When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. ¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." ¹⁹"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." ²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" ²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the

scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:14-29).

The disciples were powerless and lacked the faith to help the man's son. In this case, Jesus said that it was a demonic spirit destroying the boy's life.

In your own words, give details of what you are seeing and hearing as if you were one of the onlookers. Discuss how you think the medical establishment would treat this situation today.

- 1) The boy could not speak because the evil spirit was controlling his vocal cords (v. 17).
- 2) The spirit seized the boy and threw him to the ground (v. 18).
- 3) He ground or gnashed his teeth, and his body became rigid and foamed at the mouth (v. 18).
- 4) As soon as the evil spirit saw Jesus, he started the boy's convulsions again, rolling him around and foaming at the mouth (v. 20).
- 5) The father shared that the boy had been this way since childhood. He couldn't leave him alone because the spirit attempted to kill him by throwing him into fire or water, perhaps into a cistern, a well, or a river, seeking to drown him.

Several visible physical manifestations appeared as soon as the demonized boy came into the presence of Jesus. The Lord asked the father questions about the boy's condition (Mark 9:21). Asking questions during a ministry prayer session is always beneficial, as it enables us to gain vital clues on how to pray by identifying the root cause of a condition or its origin. When we understand what opened the door to the evil spirit, we can uproot the cause through confession and repentance, allowing the person to counteract the temptation that permitted the enemy to sow weeds in their character. Our goal is to achieve freedom for every person. The Holy Spirit can give us insight as to how to pray.

Symptoms of Demonic Influence

In our passage of Scripture in Mark's Gospel, we see the boy displaying symptoms of demonization. It would be a mistake to think that demons only operate in a person's life in this way, and just because someone is foaming at the mouth doesn't mean they are demonized. Still, I thought it would be helpful to list various symptoms of demonization. The list below was taken from the notes of a Spiritual Warfare seminar by John Wimber. Demonic influence can appear in five areas of a person's life:

- 1) Spirit
 - a. Powers of mind, ESP, precognitive abilities, occult dreams.
 - b. Inner perception of a separate personality, name, voice, or a "friend" who serves as a guide.
 - c. A sense of being "different" or "special." This may connect with an interest in reincarnation.
 - d. Fearful, bizarre dreams and/or night experiences.

2) Mind

- e. Confusion, cloudiness of thought.
- f. Separation of mind from the body—spacing out, memory lapses.
- g. Inability to concentrate on Scripture.
- h. Blockage in hearing and participating in prayer.
- i. Uncontrolled images and thoughts, i.e., sexual fantasies, thoughts of cursing others, obscenities, violent thoughts.
- j. Persistent dreams related to bizarre sex, occult pictures or scenes, and fear.
- k. Persistent battle with doubt (usually regarding scriptural truth).

3) Will

- l. Uncontrollable, compulsive behaviors, most commonly sexual sin, anger, hatred, and fear.
- m. Different personalities, “voices,” other identities.
- n. Uncontrollable surges of rebellion against authority.
- o. Intense urges toward violence.

4) Emotions

- p. Severe depression, apart from an identifiable cause.
- q. Uncontrollable, sudden fears.
- r. Unusual and not typical emotional experiences, i.e., laughter, sadness, crying, anger, etc.
- s. Intense guilt, accusation, worthlessness.
- t. Hate, anger, bitterness (inability to conquer through confession)
- u. Severe depression and/or a drive towards suicide.

5) Body

- v. The eyes: fear, anxiety, anger. Difficulty in getting eye contact.
- w. Unnatural nervousness: especially at the mention of Jesus’ name, reading Scripture, or direct prayer.
- x. Headaches, dizziness, shifts in body temperature, difficulty breathing.
- y. Persistent bodily ailments that elude medical diagnosis.
- z. Hallucinatory or auditory interference.
- aa. Extreme, medically undiagnosed fatigue.¹

We must be careful when reading such a list, as some items may stem from our sinful nature, natural illnesses and diseases, or chemical dependencies. These symptoms can also arise from a troubled emotional history. It is unfortunate, however, that the medical establishment, for the most part, does not acknowledge that humanity is composed of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The spiritual aspects of our personality are often overlooked. When we ignore what the Author of Life says about His creation, it is easy to dismiss spiritual symptoms. Most medical doctors would argue that Jesus was mistaken and that He should have prescribed certain medications to treat the man's son, which is how the boy would typically be treated in most hospitals today.

¹John Wimber, *Spiritual Warfare, Demonization*, Published by Mercy Publishing, 1988.

While the boy was thrown to the ground by the demon, the Lord rebuked the demon: “**But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father**” (Luke 9:42). With the whole crowd looking on, what did they see? The boy was delivered from the evil spirit, and the Lord also healed the boy's scars, burns, and cuts as they all watched. No wonder Luke records: “**They were all amazed at the greatness of God**” (v. 43). I would have loved to see their faces and their amazement. I hope there are reruns in heaven!

The Unbelief of the Nine Disciples

Afterward, the disciples had questions about why they couldn't cast out the evil spirit. Mark provides Jesus' explanation for why the nine could not deliver the boy:

²⁸When He came into *the* house, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?” ²⁹And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:28-29).

The Lord explained that they lacked the power that comes only through a lifestyle of prayer. The King James Version adds “and fasting” to Mark's testimony (Mark 9:29). Why do some translations omit those critical words? In most English translations, a small number is attached to the text, with the words “and fasting” added at the bottom of the page. Some English translations remove the entire verse, as in Matthew's Gospel, i.e., [**“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”**] (Matthew 17:21).

The translators face a challenge since some early Greek manuscripts include fasting while others do not [The New Testament was originally written in Greek]. This writer believes it is a mistake to omit the references to fasting, as it is our flesh that resists it; however, fasting and prayer together create a powerful force in the kingdom of God. There are times when one may not have the opportunity to fast, suggesting that Jesus is alluding to a lifestyle of prayer and fasting. By regularly incorporating fasting alongside daily prayer and meditation on Scripture, we can receive God's power for every circumstance in our lives. Fasting and prayer bring a greater anointing, by which I mean a more significant presence of the Spirit of Christ in an individual's life. Today, there is a great need for the people of God to wield the power and authority of Christ to meet the needs of the lost, the sick, and those bound by demonic spirits. As a society, the deeper we sink into sin and spiritual decay, the more demonic spirits will manifest. Men and women of faith who understand their identity in Christ pose a significant threat to demons.

What stands out to you about the following verse: “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me” (Mark 9:19). Why would Jesus feel frustrated and disappointed with the nine disciples?

Luke's narrative tells us that Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in pairs, healing the sick and casting out demons (Luke 9:1-2). Jesus also trained and sent out 72 others to do the same (Luke 10:1, 9, 17). Now, just before He departs for Jerusalem to give His life as a substitutionary sacrifice, marking His departure from this Earth, the disciples are unable to cast out a demon. Doesn't it seem that Jesus got frustrated with the disciples? In Luke's account of the same deliverance, Jesus called the nine disciples “unbelieving and perverse” [or distorted] (Luke 9:41).

Unbelief is one of the many challenges humanity faces due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. A person's frustration often serves as visual evidence of what they care about. Jesus was concerned that the disciples could minister with the power of God and deliver people from sickness and bondage to demonic influences. Each of us is called to learn to exercise the ministry of Jesus on earth under the Lord's authority and power. The nine disciples prayed for the boy, but they lacked the anointing of the Spirit that comes through prayer, faith, and God's power. The presence of Christ within us is the key, not the methods or systems we tend to rely on.

The Need for God's Power

We live in an era when the Western Church relies more on intellect than on the power of God. However, the era of business as usual has long passed. We cannot rely on our own strength to spread the Gospel to a lost world. The whole Church must preach the whole gospel to the whole world! Did you know that the world's population only surpassed one billion in 1804? It took 123 years to reach 2 billion, and only 32 years to reach 3 billion. The last several billion milestones (4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 billion) were reached in 15, 12, 11, 12, and 12 years, respectively.² The world population has now surpassed eight billion as of November 22, 2022.³ More than half of all people who have ever lived are now alive. If we don't multiply our evangelism, more people will go to a lost eternity than in all previous generations put together. Think about that! Only as we equip believers to step out and minister in the power and authority of God will the worldwide Church begin to multiply and see whole cities come to Christ. Is that not possible? Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14). Why wouldn't it be possible today if it were in the Book of Acts, where two entire cities came to the Lord after Peter healed Aeneas? (Acts 9:35).

I appreciate the insight regarding the connection between fasting and prayer. It clarifies that some situations we face can only be resolved through a deeper level of God's presence and power, which can be achieved through consistent prayer and fasting. One must make time to fast and pray. It is often impractical to ask someone to return later so that we can find time to fast and pray. If only the nine had known beforehand that they would confront a spirit resisting their commands to leave the boy, they would have prepared for that encounter. Jesus encourages a lifestyle of prayer and fasting so that we are always ready for any situation.

I don't believe the words "this kind" (Mark 9:29) refer only to a strong evil spirit; I think they relate to the stubborn conditions each of us experiences that a typical habit of prayer hasn't resolved. There can be a stronghold, a spiritual mountain in front of us that needs to be moved through times of prayer and fasting.

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20; emphasis added).

Desperate situations can be resolved through fasting and prayer together. There is no spiritual weapon like it for believers in Christ. Fasting adds intensity, earnestness, and authority to prayer. Jesus indicated that if His disciples lived a life of prayer and fasting, they would possess the faith

² <https://populationconnection.org/learn/population-milestones/>

³ <https://www.un.org/en/dayof8billion>

of God that would enable them to move mountains. In the passage of Scripture above, I don't believe He was referring to literal mountains; instead, He was using a figure of speech about immovable situations that cannot be changed without God's Spirit intervening. God will use us to speak authoritatively to situations that are like immovable mountains and see them become a level plain by God's Spirit. A mountain speaks of something that will not move, a problem where you cannot go around it; you must go through it. We need the power of God to move the mountain!

I want to draw your attention to the man in the crowd at the beginning of our study who brought his son, possessed by a demon, to Jesus. Consider his despair, as he had struggled with this situation for the entire life of the boy. The boy had suffered his whole life, since childhood. Surely this father must have been at the end of his rope, and the thought of his son being healed may have felt like an impossibility. I'm sure he had developed ways to cope with this situation, and it must have dominated the lives of the entire family. Even hoping for healing and deliverance for his son may have been challenging. I can imagine that he may have prayed for his son for years with no result. When Jesus asked him if he believed, he was honest in his response: "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!"

Is there a situation in your life or in the life of a close friend or relative that might require fasting and prayer? Perhaps you feel like this man when considering a stubborn problem in your own life or in the life of a loved one. It can seem like an immovable mountain. Jesus asks us the same question, "Do you believe?" Do you believe the power of God is greater than your situation? Think of a situation that seems impossible to you. Even if you feel that your faith is low, start to pray as this man did: "I DO believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!"

What does Jesus' response to the boy's father reveal about the heart of God? (²³ "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes.") Is there any problem or situation you'd like to share with those around you? (If you prefer not to share, feel free to pass.)

The Early Church Practiced Fasting

In a different passage of Scripture, when the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast (Luke 5:33), He replied that "the time will come when the Bridegroom will be taken from them: in those days they will fast" (Luke 5:35). In another passage, Jesus talked about "when you give," "when you pray," and "when you fast" (Matthew 6:1-18). He didn't say if you pray or if you give, or if you fast—He fully expected His people to fast. The early disciples of Christ lived a lifestyle of prayer and fasting and turned the world upside down through the power of God flowing through them (Acts 17:6). Let's consider one example of the disciples turning the world upside down:

In 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul said, "I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food." The phrase "gone without food" should be understood as Paul having "often fasted." Prior to these words, he noted that he had involuntarily experienced hunger and thirst, but Paul also voluntarily chose to fast from the food available to him. The King James Version translates the same passage: "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:27; emphasis added).

If Paul led a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, and God used him so powerfully, then this same power is available to us today. Perhaps the extent of prayer and fasting Paul practiced was what resulted in the great grace upon his life. Paul had a zealous faith, and God's power rested upon him because of fasting and prayer. In one place, he wrote:

⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Paul's testimony revealed that he had discovered a secret: the weakness of his strength was the source of God's power. He expressed his delight in being weak so that Christ's power may rest upon him. One thing is certain: we need the power of God to be active in the Church of the 21st century. It will require men and women dedicated to working with God's energy within them, rather than relying solely on our abilities apart from God's enablement. In another place, Paul wrote:

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (Colossians 1:29).

It is Christ in us, the hope of glory, who must carry out the works of the kingdom. When a man or woman seeks, through prayer and fasting, for God's Spirit to take the reins of their life, God can receive glory by performing His work through us. That's why Paul could say to the church in Rome: "I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ" (Romans 15:29). He learned that the Spirit would work powerfully through him as he served the Lord with fasting and prayer.

Practical Advice about Fasting

- 1) Avoid fasting for more than a day if you've never done it before. It's wise to build on your successes. Start by skipping breakfast and lunch, then plan to eat in the evening. Gradually increase the duration as you feel led by God.
- 2) If you typically drink tea or coffee, plan to cut out caffeine a day early so that on the first day of your fast, you aren't dealing with a massive headache in addition to having no food in your stomach. I encourage you to drink only water during the fast. Water helps cleanse toxins from our bodies during fasting. There are instances where a person fasted without water, but it is dangerous to go longer than three days without it. Moses was on a supernatural fast when he was with the Lord, abstaining from both food and water (Exodus 34:28). A person can die by going longer than three days without water.
- 3) Keep a record of your experiences and the kinds of prayers you are offering. Later, when you reflect on your time of fasting, you will feel enormously encouraged by how God has answered your prayers during this period.
- 4) If you are on medication, consult your doctor and inform them of your actions.

- 5) Get some books on fasting to encourage you. One of the best books I've read on fasting is God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis. I can also recommend Mahesh Chavda's book, "The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting," and Derek Prince's book, "Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting."
- 6) During regular mealtimes, it is wise to go to a separate room from the dining room to pray. Being present while food is cooking can be challenging to resist, especially during the first three days of a fast.
- 7) Beware of the TV. One realizes how many food commercials there are on TV when you decide to fast! It can be a powerful temptation, especially if you are feeling weak.
- 8) In the first three to four days, the body eliminates many of the toxins present due to the types of foods commonly consumed in most Western countries. You may feel weak by the end of the first day and continue to feel this way through to the fourth day. This process of detoxification is highly beneficial for your health. During this period, your urine may appear yellow, your breath might have an unpleasant odor, and if it's winter, your body may feel cold quickly. If you fast for more than four days, your strength will return once the toxins are eliminated. At that point, fasting becomes easier.
- 9) You will gain greater clarity of mind while fasting. Read the Scriptures frequently and draw near to God during your fast.
- 10) Fasting is not harmful to your health—it's a natural occurrence in the animal kingdom. The hunger pangs experienced toward the end of the first day are merely your body signaling that it's time for food. The cravings will subside.
- 11) Read Chapter 58 of the Book of Isaiah, focusing on the section about fasting, and remain mindful of your motives.
- 12) Fasting breaks the bonds of sin and loosens the grip of bad habits and their control over your life.
- 13) Pray for God to unleash the gifts of the Spirit in your life. Fasting opens one's life to new spiritual gifts from God because our spirit is humbled and attuned to the Spirit of God.
- 14) Fasting aids in weight loss. Be cautious not to overeat when you resume eating. During the fast, your stomach will shrink, and overeating afterward can be dangerous. Any fast longer than six days should be broken with broth or easily digestible foods.
- 15) There are different kinds of fasts. Daniel and his three friends went on a vegetable and water fast (Daniel 1:12). Later, he fasted for three weeks, during which no choice food, meat, or wine touched his lips (Daniel 10:2-3). Decide for yourself how you are going to fast. Ask God to show you what kind of fast you are to undertake. If you have a medical condition or are on any medication that would make it inadvisable to fast, ask God if there is something you could give up in place of food. Use that time to pray instead.
- 16) Avoid heavy exercise or long walks. It's easy to become very tired and feel tempted to break your fast early.
- 17) An average healthy person with no medical conditions can fast for up to 40 days. Around that time, when hunger pangs return, a person starts to experience the symptoms of starvation. Beyond 40 days, our bodies begin to consume living cells instead of fat. Jesus fasted for forty days, and at that point, the Bible tells us that He was hungry. When the hunger pangs return, it is time to break your fast. Satan's temptation of Jesus began at the end of His forty-day fast when the hunger pangs started, tempting Him with bread (Matthew 4:2-3). It's possible that all three temptations occurred on one day, the last day of His fast.

My Personal Experience of Fasting

Several years ago, my wife and I felt a strong urge to fast and pray for someone close to us. The Lord guided us to fast for ten days on water for a person struggling with her faith. We believed this was an attack from the enemy aimed at separating her, not only from us but also from her newfound faith in Christ. After ten days of prayer and fasting for this individual, she arrived at our door in tearful repentance and brokenness. We prayed and talked. Before this knock on the door, we hadn't contacted her or invited her over; the Holy Spirit prompted her to visit. It was an answer to prayer. She returned to her faith in Christ and now has her own stories of answered prayer. Fasting helps to loosen the bonds that the enemy has on a person's life, allowing them to respond freely to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you have a loved one you've been praying for, and you sincerely desire to see a breakthrough. Is God calling you to fast and pray for them? Some situations won't change until someone enters the battle with prayer and fasting. Fasting, combined with fervent prayer, is a powerful combination. **"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).**

Prayer: Father, we pray that You help us in our weakness to know Your strength. We need You to move the mountains that stand in opposition to what You want to accomplish in our families. Teach us to walk with a greater anointing of Your Spirit to do Your works. Amen!

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