

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-12 Spiritual Encounters: Wrestling Against Spiritual Forces

Have you ever had a difficult conversation with someone about spiritual things? No matter how agreeable and open they appear to be, you feel they aren't receiving a thing you are saying. Or, maybe the opposite has occurred. People say they aren't interested, but they are listening to every word you are saying. They can hardly wait for you to say more. Things aren't always as they seem to the natural eye, especially when it comes to sharing spiritual matters. How can we know what is happening in the spiritual realm beyond our human senses? What authority should we turn to for answers regarding the supernatural? God's Word, of course!

The Bible has several teachings about what is actually occurring in our spiritual encounters with others. When it comes to sharing spiritual truths with them, a battle might be taking place. This is especially true if you are trying to lead them to commit their lives to Christ. The apostle Paul shares some insights into the importance of prayer when it comes to sharing the mystery of the gospel. He says that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).

When sharing your faith, it may seem that the other person's mood or personality is resistant to the gospel. The Scriptures speak of another reason for such resistance. There may be demonic powers and evil spiritual forces that are actually at work in their lives. These go beyond what we can see with our natural eyes. We need to be aware that there is a spiritual battle taking place for their very souls. The good news is that God has given us weapons to help us to win the battle against these forces.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul went on to say that the key to winning this battle against evil forces is prayer. After noting the nature of the spiritual resistance we will face, he tells us: "Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, to **stand**. **Stand firm** then...." He repeats this command to 'stand' three times. It's like the military stance of the Roman soldier before the battle. We are to stand steady, wearing the full armor of God, and with our feet firmly planted. You may be asking, "How does one stand firm against spiritual opposition?" The answer is, through prayer!

Paul briefly describes the spiritual armor with which we are to arm ourselves. Then he moves on to show the importance of prayer in spiritual warfare—by the sheer number of times he mentions it. He uses various words to describe it. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." He asks the Ephesians to pray for two things. First of all, for all the saints who are involved in spiritual warfare. They need God's provision to gain the victory. Secondly, he requests in the next verse, "Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (Eph 6:18-20).

We see that Paul asks prayer for himself in two ways: 1) that he might be given the words to speak to declare the mystery of the gospel, and 2) that he may receive holy boldness, to come

against any fear he has in sharing the gospel. He asks twice for the Ephesians to pray for him to overcome fear. Fear must have been a major issue in his life.

These are the words of one of the greatest evangelists of all times, apart from Jesus himself. He had planted churches all around the Mediterranean Sea. He wrote one-third of the New Testament. He preached in the open air regularly, and was persecuted mightily for his faith. He recounts his sufferings in his letters. Yet, he still struggled with fear when sharing his faith.

Do you have fear when it comes to sharing your faith? If we are honest, we would all say we do. But the Scriptures tell us that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind” (2Tim 1:7, NKJV). Fear is the number one weapon our adversary, the evil one, uses to hinder us from sharing our faith.

The writer of this lesson has been doing evangelism for more than 30 years in all kinds of places around the United States and Latin America. I have taught evangelism courses in many churches, colleges, and seminaries. Yet, every time I go to share my faith, fear comes upon me. I compare it to a brick wall that appears before me. I know where it comes from and it is not from God. It is like smoke or fog, which goes away as soon as I step out in faith. When I move forward in faith, fear disappears. After witnessing to thousands of people at their doorstep and on the city streets, I still have some fear. But, the Lord gives me faith to overcome it.

Paul used many different words for prayer. This shows the priority he gave to it in his own life. We see five different words used just in this passage about spiritual warfare. Prayer is the key that will help us to overcome our fears and that will give us a holy boldness. Then we can proclaim with confidence the mystery of the gospel to others in need of Jesus. Praying is the key to opening the hearts of others to the gospel story. It is the foundation of our spiritual life. And it is the greatest weapon we have against the attack of the evil one and his helpers.

This story is **important** as it shows us that when we approach spiritual conversations, we need to recognize there is resistance to the gospel. This goes beyond human personality or thinking. It is inspired by and involves demonic influences.

The **central truth** of this lesson is that the main weapon we have in our spiritual battle for the souls of humans is prayer. Likewise, our own spiritual welfare depends on prayer—our prayers and those of others. It is the key to our victory in the spiritual realm. It rightly takes the focus off of us and our abilities and puts the focus on the power of God to transform lives.

Review Questions

1. Paul says that we don't battle against flesh and blood but against rulers and authorities outside of humans. Where does this battle take place? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you said, “It takes place in the heavenly or spiritual realm,” you would be correct.
2. When Paul tells the Ephesians that they should stand firm against the devil's schemes when the day of evil comes, what is he asking them to do? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that he commanded them to remain steadfast in prayer using this as the means to resist evil, you are right.

3. According to the lesson, what is the number one weapon the evil one uses to keep us from sharing our faith? [Pause]

A. If you said that fear is the primary weapon the evil one uses against us to stop us from sharing our faith, you are correct.

4. How can we overcome the fear that almost certainly will come upon us when sharing our faith? [Pause]

A. If you answered, “By standing firm in prayer and putting on the whole armor of God, as described by Paul in Ephesians chapter 6,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen again to Paul’s teachings about wrestling with spiritual forces. Listen as many times as you need to, until you are able to tell the instructions in your own words. Then share these truths with one of your fellow leaders. Memorize the Scripture: “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind” (2Tim 1:7).

Can you recall a time when you felt like you were in an intense spiritual battle? What did you do to overcome the oppression you felt at the time? Did you quote scripture, ask for prayer from others, or cry out to the Lord for deliverance? The next time you are in a spiritual battle and you sense spiritual opposition, stop and pray in the Spirit. Note the outcome.