

# **Missional Prayer Strategic Prayer**

*Luke 10:2-3, 17-20*

1. A reasoned, seasoned approach.
2. Principalities, powers, and preparation.
3. Oppression and prayer patterns.



West Valley Church  
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## Missional Prayer<sup>1</sup> Part 4: Strategic Prayer<sup>2</sup>

We are in the last part of our series on “Missional Prayer.” Missional prayer is more than simply praying for our needs or the needs of others. *Missional prayer is praying for the advancement of the Kingdom of God in our lives, our church, our community, and our world.*

We have been in this series on missional prayer because God is calling our church to greater effectiveness in the Kingdom of God, and that means he is calling us to a *deeper* culture of prayer. Let me say this again: we do an excellent job of praying for each other's needs. When there are health issues, personal crises, or deep needs, we as a church are very, very good at praying for each other when we ask the church to do so. You are a wonderfully praying church. But there is much, much more to prayer than *just* praying for our needs.

In this series, we first learned how to pray for our church, then we learned how to pray for others and what intercessory prayer is. Last week we learned how to pray for the unchurched: we need to have passion for the lost (and pray to get it!), we need to pray and ask for God to send workers out to invite people into the church, and then we are to go out and be the answer to that prayer.

Today, we are going to learn about what we're calling “strategic prayer.” Here's what I mean by that: *strategic prayer is recognition of our enemy and his work, and therefore praying for mission advancement in ways that hinder or remove the enemy's influence.*

So, I suppose you could call strategic prayer something like “warfare prayer,” but that phrase has come to represent all kinds of crazies – everything from people who see a demon behind every bush, to the name it and claim it prosperity preachers who cast out manufactured demons in order to get money from their foolish followers. Here's an old photo from a charlatan who was holding services in the early part of the last century: I

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### <sup>1</sup> Resources for this series:

- Dick Eastman *On Prayer* (Global Christian Publishers, 1999)
- Wesley L. Duewel *Touch the World Through Prayer* (Asbury Press, Grand Rapids, MI 1986)
- Alistair Begg *Pray Big: Learn to Pray Like an Apostle* (GoodBook Co., EU 2019)
- Craig Groeschel *Dangerous Prayers* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2020)
- S.D. Gordon *Five Laws that Govern Prayer* (Fleming H. Revell, New York 1937)
- Richard Foster *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (Harper, San Francisco 1992)

### <sup>2</sup> Resources for this message:

- Thomas B. White *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI 1990)
- Thomas B. White *Breaking Strongholds: How Spiritual Warfare Sets Captives Free* (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI 1993)
- C. Peter Wagner *Warfare Prayer* (Regal Books, Ventura, CA 1992)
- C. Peter Wagner *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* (Regal Books, Ventura, CA 1993)
- Paul E. Billheimer *Destined to Overcome: The Technique of Spiritual Warfare* (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, Minn 1982)
- M. Scott Peck *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (Touchstone, NY 1983)
- Malachi Martin *Hostage to the Devil: The Possession and Exorcism of Five Americans* (Perennial Library, 1976)
- C.S. Lewis *The Screwtape Letters* (C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd, 1942)

don't know if there's a connection between casted out demons and fried chicken, but exorcisms can work up quite an appetite, I guess.

There are two pitfalls that people fall into when it comes to dealing with the work of our enemy, whom we call Satan, although more accurately is pronounced "the sawtawn." One is that people become overly fascinated with the supernatural and it becomes sensationalized, giving Satan too much press and too much credit. The other is to become so dismissive of the devil that people believe that our spiritual foe is a work of fiction, and therefore should be treated as such.

Our enemy is happy with either one: with the first one, people become overly preoccupied with him and begin to lose focus on Christ and living for his kingdom mission of love. With the second, they fail to recognize that we are in fact dealing with real supernatural forces, so they are defeated in their mission without even realizing it, instead blaming their roadblocks on circumstance.

So, with our time together today and learning how to pray strategically when it comes to our enemy, it is going to be important that we keep the right perspective and priorities. And I think there's some teaching that Jesus gives us that will help us do just that. I want to read it to us from Luke's Gospel account.

Do you remember what we talked about from Matthew's Gospel last week, when Jesus told us to pray for workers for the harvest field, and then right away sends US out into the harvest to reach people and introduce them to Jesus and invite them into the Church? Well, this passage we're going to look at today follows up on that very teaching, but it is in Luke instead. So, would you please focus on these words by standing, and honor the fact that it is God's Word being read to us? Thank you:

He (Jesus) told them (the disciples), "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves... The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:2-3, 17-20, niv)

Thanks for standing – you can be seated. This passage gives us our priority perspectives, and then we will look specifically at how to pray strategically.

So Jesus sends out the 72 disciples into the harvest, armed with the urgency of the message, instructions for the journey, and a warning about possible rejection. They go out, and they find great success. They return and they are so excited! They report that "even the demons submit to us in your name!" So, right away, they not only see the supernatural at work, they see the power of Jesus' name at work, too. Even just the name of Jesus causes the enemy and his minions to obey. For the disciples, this is the *greatest* spiritual sign or signal or miraculous thing they've ever seen or done.

But Jesus says something really interesting next; first, Jesus confirms what they've experienced and reiterates his own authority – that he is, in fact, God. Jesus says, "I saw

Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” You can take that one of several ways – he could be referring to what happened while the disciples were out. He could be referring to Satan’s defeat in the wilderness when he tried to tempt Jesus. He could be referring to Satan’s defeat when Jesus entered our world. Or, Jesus could be referring to an event that happened long ago in the heavenly places, when Satan gathered a third of the angels and tried to wage war against God and overthrow God and take over heaven, but was defeated and cast down from heaven (Isaiah 14:12). All four of those would be correct, but most likely it’s the last one. In other words, Jesus is saying: “I am God. I was on the throne when Satan tried to overthrow the Kingdom of God in Heaven. I was the one who cast him down from heaven.” So Jesus is telling his disciples, “This authority you are experiencing is not a temporary thing. I have always had ultimate power and authority, and I always will. I am God. There is no one greater.”

So then Jesus says, “I am authorizing you with my power.” He says, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you.”

That’s an interesting picture that comes to mind. Snakes and scorpions represent all the elements of the devil – Satan himself and all his demonic angels. Notice though that Jesus did *not* say, “I’ve given you authority to stomp on them...” What happens when you stomp, as opposed to when you trample? To *stomp*, that is the goal of what I’m doing – my goal is to stomp the enemy. But *trampling* on something is what happens *when I’m on my way to something else*, and something comes up underfoot, so I step on them, and they don’t slow me down.

Jesus is saying to them and to us, “I’m sending you on mission to introduce people to me. I’m giving you authority so that the enemy will be nothing more than a nuisance underfoot, and you will trample on anything he throws at you, on your way to accomplishing my mission.” Get that? *The priority is the mission of introducing people to Jesus*, and Jesus’ authority will not let Satan trip you up if you are pursuing that.

Then Jesus points out the *real* supernatural miracle – something FAR, FAR more important than any kind of spiritual warfare, demon busting garbage. Jesus says, “Don’t get all excited about what the enemy does and what you can do. THE greatest thing of all is that you can be forgiven from sin and be saved, you can become a child of God, your name can be written in God’s book of Salvation!!!” That – *THAT* – is the greatest spiritual victory of all.

So, when it comes to dealing with the enemy, if you are a Christian, you have authority over the enemy in Jesus’ name, so Satan will not hinder you from carrying out Jesus’ mission. The greatest miracle of all is that God saved you, and that you can help that happen for other people, too. Got it? Keep *that* priority in mind as we proceed. And, by the way, if you are not out pursuing Jesus’ mission by introducing other people to Jesus, well, then, you will end up with one of the two extremes earlier – you will either be distracted by the enemy, or you will dismiss the enemy as if he’s not real. Folks, we are in a spiritual battle over the lives of unchurched people. If you are not carrying out that mission, you are losing the battle. It’s *that* serious, folks.

So keep *that* priority in mind: strategic prayer is only to assist us in accomplishing our mission of introducing people to Jesus. Now let’s see what is involved. You should know

that what I am sharing with you is from extensive Christian experts and writers, and from my own experiences in dealing with the demonic. I've given you a sort of bibliography of a portion of my resources, listed in the manuscript so you can download it and see. In fact, much of what I'm going to share with you is from a book called *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, by Thomas White, who happens to be a friend of ours from way back in our days as a youth pastor in Corvallis, Oregon. But I'm also telling you that any pastor and any believer who is trying to accomplish the mission of God for the Church in Christ will at some point encounter the enemy, both directly and indirectly. So strategic prayer is important.

The first thing we must have when it comes to strategic prayer is...

### 1. A ***reasoned, seasoned*** approach.

Like I said earlier, we don't want to run off into extremes, blaming every hang nail on the devil and casting demons out of toasters or something. We have to recognize that there are typically three areas that are at play when it comes to spiritual obstacles in our lives and the lives of others: self, sin, and Satan. Let's quickly look at each, starting with the self. Each of us are a tangled bundle of experiences, upbringing, emotion, and dysfunction. Many of us carry issues related to past trauma, poor self-image, brokenness, anxiety, and wrong thinking. There is also always the possibility of mental health issues and chemical imbalances, that may either be the cause or the result of some of that dysfunction. Of course, when we become Christians, God begins to work on our whole, entire selves – working to help us become healthy in every way – heart, soul, mind, and strength. The healthier we are, the more we become what God created us to be and the more effective we are in his Kingdom mission. But often these areas of “self” serve as deficiencies in our ability to grow in our faith and function in God's mission. So, when it comes to the topic of spiritual warfare, a lot of people blame those things on the devil. That would make it easier. And if you think about it, it really would. If we blame the devil, then those issues are not inherently within us, so all we need is some kind of magic bullet prayer for deliverance and voila! We are free. There's no hard work of counseling, therapy, or corrective thinking and action.

So, I think you can see when it comes to the issue of “self,” that if we are going to have a reasoned, seasoned approach, it is always best to start with your doctor, and even a good counselor or psychiatrist, along with spiritual counsel from a pastor (especially if the counselor isn't a Christian).

However, it *is* very possible that the enemy is *contributing* to the fallout of that dysfunction; sort of like poking an open wound. You see – and this is important! – anything the enemy can do to keep you from reaching your highest and best in Christ will hinder your ability to be effective in the Kingdom of God. So, for instance, if you were raised in an environment of belittlement and shame, you will struggle with self-worth. So, the enemy will constantly accuse you of being a failure, of being worthless, and tell you not to attempt to do anything great for God. If you grew up rejected and abused by your parent or parents, or someone else, you will naturally feel unloved, and the enemy will tell you it's because you *are* unloved and unlovable – that even God couldn't love you.

So sometimes it's possible, too, the worse the trauma you've experienced, such as abuse, the greater the oppression by the enemy. I'll explain what I mean by "oppression" in a bit. But when it comes to prayer, pray for wisdom, and go see a doctor or counselor! When someone comes to me for counseling, I'm not a professional counselor; I am a pastoral counselor. So when we meet, I'm trying to assess if I can help you, or if you need to see a professional, and then I can assist. I will of course always pray and help in any way that I can.

Next is the problem of sin. Sin in our lives will have natural consequences that result in broken thinking and broken relationships, and those can even manifest into physical problems. That is NOT to say if you have emotional or physical problems it is because you have sinned; not all problems are from sin and not all sin leads to those problems. Still, unresolved and repetitive sins result in an open door to the enemy to have greater latitude in your life.

Finally, of course, is the problem of Satan. And all of us struggle to some degree under Satan's influence. More on that in a little bit.

But all of that to say we are whole people, and that means there are lots of possible reasons for the problems we may be having. Often, the enemy is the *last* one that is the issue – if at all. So we must always pray for wisdom and have a wholistic, reasoned, seasoned approach.

Let me give you an example. When I was a youth pastor outside of Denver, Colorado, the Billy Graham Crusade came to Denver. We took a bus load of 40-50 teens to that event, and many of them gave their lives to Christ. One of those was a young lady who was fairly new to our group.

She had started seeing a counselor before becoming a Christian to deal with some mild depression. Shortly after accepting Christ, she began to struggle strongly with depression.

As Shelly and I met with her and began to disciple her, those problems became more pronounced. In fact, during one particular time when she was in our home with Shelly and I, some paranormal events began to take place.

As we met with her, we learned more of her story. She had been sexually abused as a young girl. Then, as a junior higher, she began to dabble in the occult, using a Ouija board and had a spell book of witchcraft and tokens in her room. There were two issues involved: dealing with her broken psyche and emotions, but also dealing with the increased oppression from the enemy, who was even more desperate in his attempts to keep her away from the Lord. We prayed with and for her, helped her break free from those items as she burned and buried them, and she made great strides with her counselor.

To have approached her by blaming everything on the devil would've never led to healing of her wounded heart. To ignore the enemy's involvement would have been foolish and kept her in a destructive cycle.

We need a reasoned, seasoned approach to strategic prayer.

Secondly, then, we must make sure we understand what is involved in...

## **2. Principalities, powers, and preparation.**

First of all, it's important to understand that the enemy – the devil himself – is a uni-present being. God is omnipresent – he is all places at all times. He is all knowing, and all powerful. The enemy is not. Satan is not God's equal – nothing is God's equal. If anything, Satan is equal in power with the Arch-angel, Michael, who is the general of the Lord's armies (Jesus is the Commander in Chief!). Before Satan rebelled against God, he was in heaven and equal in rank with Michael in the hierarchy of angels. But Satan cannot be in more than one place at one time. He is a created being; only God is omnipresent. Therefore, Satan relies on his legions and legions and legions of fallen angels, or demons. So when we talk about the enemy, or the Satan, and his involvement in our lives, we are speaking generally. None of us deals with the devil directly; perhaps the Apostles did, but you and I would have to be some kind of super-spiritual threat for that to happen. So when we deal with the enemy, it's some lower level of the demonic.

In Ephesians 6:12, the Apostle Paul tells us:

“For 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.” (Ephesians 6:12, niv)

We don't have time to go into detail about the hierarchical levels of legions – you can read the resources I've listed to learn more about that. But just understand that there are different demonic spiritual influences, from the highest level, to being over nations and governments, to being over cultural practices (like media, music, movies), to being over geographical areas (where perhaps wide spread evil or ritualistic sacrifices took place) or familial sins (for instance, if a past family member from generations before was involved in Satanic practices, organized crime, sex trafficking, and the like), or even just the day to day dogging of the believer.

Knowing these things helps you to be able to prepare yourself for strategic prayer.

Preparation is key. First, before you take on any kind of strategic prayer, be sure you are fully submitted to the Lord and not dealing with any unconfessed sin in your life. Then, you must be sure you have on your spiritual armor. Pray through Ephesians 6:10-18 where the Apostle Paul lists the armor we wear as believers, being sure you are equipped in every way so that, Paul says, you can “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.” (Ephesians 6:18, niv)

Then be sure you understand what you are praying about...

## **3. Oppression and prayer patterns.**

First, we need to understand the difference between oppression and possession. Whenever we think of the devil, our minds rush to the sensational, and we think of all those crazy movies about demon possession (which there are a glut of, and by the way I have no idea why you would want to watch them.).

But my understanding and experience, and the experience of those I know and have read, is

that rarely, *rarely* – is someone dealing with possession. For possession to happen, a person must give permission. God has given you free will; even God won't fill you with his Spirit unless you invite him to. The devil must follow those same rules. So, for a person to become possessed, they must either willingly surrender, or surrender more and more of their lives over time until there is nothing left.

What we are almost always talking about and strategically praying about is oppression – every believer, and every *person*, believer or not, is dealing with some degree of oppressive action by the enemy. It's kind of like nine years when I was on an exploratory trip to Cuba with a group of pastors. We were exploring the possibilities of increasing the work of the global Church of the Nazarene within Cuba. Our church is there – we have a seminary and we have churches – but the church outside Cuba hasn't been able to help much. Due to the political climate, we knew that while we were there, we were being watched. There were cameras and listening devices in our rooms. We were followed most everywhere. We were told not to go off alone because there was a high likelihood that we wouldn't come back. It didn't stop us from doing our work, but we knew we were being harassed and oppressed. That's sort of what we are talking about here.

The enemy's primary goal is to keep you and I away from salvation and headed toward an eternity without God. Now if Satan can't have that, then at least he wants to oppress us and keep us living at less than our best for Christ, living below the spiritual poverty level. Someone once said, "If the devil can't keep you dead in sin, the next best thing is to keep you in your grave clothes." Meaning this: you might be out of the tomb, but your impact in this world is no more than a dead person's.

Why is that the enemy's goal? Because he hates God. And the object of God's highest love is his creation, and the highest in creation is you. He made people to be just a little lower than the angels, according to Psalm 8:5, *you* are the apple of God's eye (Psalm 17). God paid the highest price to buy you back – the life of his own son. God loves you that much. Satan knows he cannot defeat God, but he *can* hurt God by keeping you headed to hell. And if you *have* accepted Christ, well then, the enemy is trying to limit your impact for God's mission. So he'll keep you defeated, pre-occupied with yourself or with sin. So he does that by oppressing you in various ways and various degrees.

The Apostle Paul said:

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."  
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9, niv).

So what do you do? The best defense in this case is a good offense! Live so closely to the Lord, live surrendered to him and allowing his Holy Spirit to fill you, empower you, and use you, always living a life of love for God and love for others, and always introducing people to Jesus. If you are living this way, then you will find that the enemy amounts to nothing more than snakes and scorpions under your feet. They are dangerous to you if you stand there among them or play with them, but they are squashed as you rush to tell other people about Jesus.

*So you will pray.* The more closely you walk with Jesus, the more sensitive you will be to his promptings to pray for something or someone, and you'll do some trampling. What the



disciples learned and what we need to learn is that power in prayer is not at our disposal to puff up our pride or to provide us with material possessions. Power in prayer is for you and me to grow more closely to Christ as we pray for the church, for others, for the unchurched, and strategically to accomplish the mission of God in this world. That's why the Apostle Paul told us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray continually..." (niv) in Philippians 4:6, "pray about everything..." in Ephesians 6:18 to "pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion..." and Jesus taught us to "always pray and not give up..." (Luke 18:1)

So, let's pray.

*Give us wisdom – a reasoned, seasoned approach.*

*Let us not be ignorant of our enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion – principalities, powers, and be prepared, understanding oppression, and living fully for Christ, in the power of the Spirit, praying at all times for all things, for the success of the Mission of the Kingdom of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!*

Listen: We have an enemy, but our enemy is NEVER ever another human being! Paul said we wrestle not with flesh and blood!

*Lord's prayer.*

*Dismiss.*