

Primer on Spiritual Warfare

Here at JFBC Global Ministries, we are thrilled that you have chosen to participate in a short-term mission trip! Thank you for taking the step of faith and deciding to be used of God for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. We are praying that this trip will be a life-changing experience both for you and for the people you will meet. Know that everything you do must be bathed in prayer because apart from the Holy Spirit's power, all of our efforts to transform lives with the gospel will be in vain.

It is for this reason that we offer you this Primer on Spiritual Warfare. A manual such as this may prove to be the most important tool for your training as a short-term missionary. We pray that you will not only read it, but will begin to put into practice the principles contained herein long before your departure date.

What Happened?

John is utterly exhausted. Ten days ago he stepped on the plane with high hopes for an amazing cross-cultural experience on his first-ever overseas trip. As he sat in his seat, John felt a sense of relief that all the preparations were behind and the trip had begun. Months of planning and meetings had gone into this week, but looking back, he never would have expected to encounter all the problems the team faced. How could such an organized, well-prepared trip prove to be such a disaster? Constant delays, schedule changes, sour stomachs, bickering among team members, and fatigue blasted them like the hot air John felt when he first stepped onto that African tarmac. Something went terribly wrong...

- The vaccinations were in order. So why did everyone get sick?
- The schedule was set weeks in advance. So why all these unforeseen changes?
- They did the cultural training and team-building exercises. So why all the bickering as a team and with the local missionary?
- They got enough sleep. So why the constant fatigue?

Now back at home, John is perplexed and defeated, wondering "what in the world did we miss?"

Spiritual Warfare

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)

In the above scenario, John missed the most critical part of trip preparation—gearing up for spiritual warfare. In spite of all the preparations and all the training, the team was not prepared for the true purpose of the mission trip—advancing the Kingdom of God in the unseen realm. Regardless of the kind of platform used—VBS, construction, music, sports, medicine, even evangelism, without giving proper attention to the spiritual war, all efforts are in vain.

But what is spiritual warfare? According to one theologian, "Spiritual warfare is the Christian encounter with evil supernatural powers led by Satan and his army of fallen angels...The original battle was between Satan and God, but on the level of the heavenlies, the war has been won decisively by God."¹

If God already won, why do we still fight? "On earth the battles continue, but the issue is to determine not who will win but whether God's people will appropriate the victory won for them by the cross and the resurrection."² In other words, although there is a great spiritual battle to be fought, our enemy is a defeated foe.

When we step into a foreign country to share the gospel, there are "rulers ... authorities ...[and] powers of this dark world" that are determined to defeat us. They are aware of our presence, they know our objectives and they are ready to thwart us. So when you choose to go on a JFBC short-term trip, you have signed up for war!

¹ Timothy M. Warner, "Spiritual Warfare," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, A. Scott Moreau, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 902.

² Warner, "Spiritual Warfare," 902.

The Battleground: Examples from the Field

Perhaps at this point, you're sensing anxiety creep up inside of you. Perhaps you have never done anything remotely similar to battling unseen forces of darkness. You may be asking yourself, "what does this war look like?" and "who am I to get involved in this stuff?"

This manual will attempt to answer both of these questions. To begin with, in order to give you a better sense of what is meant by spiritual warfare, we compiled five examples from missionaries in Asia, Latin America, and Europe, each of which is a JFBC partner. We asked each to answer several questions related to spiritual warfare in the country where they serve.

Central Asia (Closed Muslim Country)

This first country, formerly part of the Soviet Union, has seen an explosive growth of believers since independence in the early 1990s. At that time, there were only a small handful of known believers. Today they number in the tens of thousands. And yet still the overwhelming majority of the population is unevangelized. The following is an interview with our partners there whose names are omitted for security purposes.³

Q. How would you describe the spiritual battle that you face in the field where you serve?

A. "The battle varies from location to location and person to person, I would think. But, where we have served, one of the areas of spiritual attack has been fear. Fear is used by the enemy to hold people back from stepping forward and being light, sharing truth boldly, and gathering together for worship. This fear, if lived in long enough, can begin to influence international workers in the same ways."

Q. How is spiritual warfare different there than back home or even other countries where you may have served?

A. "The spiritual battle is more evident. People living in fear of all things. It is also felt more due to constant pressure by the government. In [this country] this has not been the case in the recent past, but as the government continues to change its laws, fear will begin to be a factor to deal with. Questions people may soon face: Is it safe to worship together? Will we continue to worship together even if it is not safe? Is it safe to share Jesus with this individual? Will I still take the opportunity even if I am not sure if this person is safe?"

Q. How can we better equip short-term missionaries to be prepared for this battle?

A. "Pray through [the Word] especially for wisdom, discretion, and boldness for your team, as well as for the workers and nationals you will be working with. Other ways we stay strong in the battle: Fasting regularly and praying constantly, Bible study, memorizing scripture, gathering with other believers for worship, continue making disciples."

Peru, South America

Pepe and Erin Acat ⁴ host short-term youth and sports mission teams in Peru for the purposes of evangelism and church planting. They have hosted many JFBC student teams over the years.

Q. How would you describe the spiritual battle that you face in the field where you serve?

A. "We often face spiritual battles in the form of tangible roadblocks that get in the way of the effectiveness of our short-term teams. These roadblocks come in many different forms: plans falling through at ministry sites, logistics not working out as planned (buses breaking down, plane flights canceled), team members getting sick/hurt/discouraged, etc. Often times these challenges are pretty disheartening for mission teams, but we have also seen how these things can draw teams together to pray and persevere. These are all reminders that we must keep our minds focused on prayer and on the task at hand--God is ultimately in control."

"We have also had to fight against the temptation of feeling that we ourselves are making a mission trip work, when it is really God at work through us. Sometimes when everything goes according to our plans, it's tempting to see that as a personal success. On the flip side, when things aren't going as we planned, we feel that we have failed. We have to fight the temptation to be in control and remember that God is in control, and that only He can determine the outcome and the impact of each mission trip. No matter what we do right or wrong, He will accomplish the things He wants to accomplish in the hearts of the mission team and the place where we are serving."

³Undisclosed name for security purposes, interview by author, 21 April 2009, via email.

⁴Erin Acat of *Frontline Peru*, interview by author, 21 April 2009, via email.

Q. How is spiritual warfare different there than back home or even other countries where you may have served?

A. "A lot of times spiritual warfare in the states seems a lot more in your face -- people downright closed to hearing about Jesus, going to church, or talking to any sort of "religious person". We also experienced this a bit in Argentina a few years ago; the people just didn't seem as open to want to hear the gospel, and they were pretty content with their lives as is. In Peru, where many of the people are warm, welcoming, and open to hearing the gospel, it seems that the devil has to do whatever he can to keep us from physically getting to the people and sharing the gospel with them."

Q. How can we better equip members who would serve you on short-term teams to be prepared for this battle?

A. "Preparing teams well to serve on a mission trip involves...preparing the team for an attitude of service...We feel it is of utmost importance that short-term team members understand their role as a member on a short-term MISSION team. They are joining a MISSION; they are not going on a field trip, a vacation, or a cultural getaway. Their first and primary focus on the trip should be to serve others and to be students of another culture. Sightseeing and personal agendas must all be secondary to the mission at hand. When teams are able to focus themselves and their hearts on their mission, it is amazing to see how little they are swayed by the little things along the way: the heat/bugs/discomforts of a new place, scheduling changes, and just plain not being in charge. Suddenly what each person wants can be surrendered for the time being, and all efforts can be poured into the team and the mission trip. In the past, the people we have seen struggle most with being flexible are those who had erroneous expectations for the trip, thinking that they were there primarily to see Peru, and maybe to help a few people along the way."

Eastern Europe

JFBC members Matt and EB Jackson ⁵ serve in Budapest, Hungary with Campus Crusade overseeing fundraising efforts of Crusade missionaries located throughout Eastern Europe.

Q. How would you describe the spiritual battle that you face?

A. "Spiritual battle here is not obvious but still real in Europe. It is displayed more in apathy or cynicism toward God. God as revealed in the New Testament is no longer an option in the cafeteria of worldviews; He is not considered relevant here in Europe. This is perhaps the slickest of all schemes regarding spiritual battle.

"My approach toward praying about the spiritual battle is to focus less on Satan and more on God Himself. After all, Jesus is "far above all rule, authority, power and dominion, above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come," (Ephesians 1:21). To rebuke Satan or bind the evil one prayerfully can sometimes lead to an unhealthy and improper focus on the enemy when it should be on the supremacy of Christ. Satan, although he prowls like a roaring lion and is worthy of our respect, will be ultimately a loser. My prayers should be directed at the greater "He who is in me" and not the lesser "he who is in the world."

"I have come to believe that there are "territories" of demonic powers. For example, anytime I travel to a country for the first time in order to do ministry, there is a tougher resistance to the task God has laid on me. Whether China or Czech Republic, I have noticed it. Subsequent trips are not as difficult as I am entering, I believe, ground that has been claimed by the Lord that needed to be fought for in the opening journey..."

Q. How can we better equip members to be prepared for this battle?

A. "Encourage prayer before and during their trip--Corporate prayer meetings, a prayer chain, declared days of fasting and praying.

"Also, I have learned to treat the forces of darkness with respect without fearing. A young Christian man in Bosnia was complaining of spiritual harassment when I was there several years ago. I mocked those forces of darkness and then within a few days became very sick, the sickest I had been in years. I don't think it was a coincidence. While still confident that in Christ I have nothing to fear, I approach similar situations knowing that without Jesus Christ, the forces of darkness would destroy me."

⁵Matt Jackson of *Campus Crusade for Christ International*, interview by author, 20 April 2009, via email.

Kamchatka, Russia

JFBC partners Tracy and Genie Putnam ⁶ serve as church planters in western Russia with the International Mission Board.

Q. How would you describe the spiritual battle that you face?

A. "Government Opposition: Russian culture is Asiatic in its government structure with a vertical view of power. The result pertaining to our situation is one official serving as the gate-keeper for our ability to live in the city and obtain appropriate permits. The current official has openly denied long-term permits to missionaries/humanitarian workers based on the nature of their work."

"Our own family is experiencing added difficulty that coincided with the planting of the new church. In 2008, we were only allowed to live in Russia for a three month period with the following 3 months spend somewhere other than in Russia. 2009 presents a little better circumstance, but still traveling internationally four times a year for visa renewal raises the stress, adds volumes of paperwork, and grows very expensive."

"Religious Opposition: We are blessed not to have an antagonistic priest in our city bent on ridding the land of all non-Orthodox influences. We do face an ingrained presupposition among the populace that real Christians are Orthodox and everyone else is a cult. This idea coupled with an extremely poor example of Christianity over the last millennium (work-based salvation, syncretistic blend of Christian themes with animism, and over-emphasis on the transcendence of God making Him unknowable), create a challenging environment to communicate the gospel."

Q. How can we better equip members who would serve you on short-term teams to be prepared for this battle?

A. "Prayer cannot be an afterthought. Jesus states that some demons can only be cast out by prayer and fasting. That is the situation here. The enemy has such a strong grasp on the culture, the government, and the people—he is not easily thrown off a person's life. We suggest setting aside time weekly to not only pray but fast before arriving to the field."

"The unavoidability of warfare has come into sharper focus for me. I think the reality of spiritual warfare is that in winning, it's going to hurt. Opposition is to be expected and counted as part of the cost of entering the arena. Peter states—"don't be surprised when the fiery trial comes upon you as if some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Pet 4:12). But through these events, God shows Himself "mighty to save" (Is 63:1) and pushes us into closer fellowship with Him."

Cuba

Our partners working in Cuba ⁷ are involved in church planting throughout the entire island. Cuba has seen an explosive spread of the gospel in recent years.

Q. How would you describe the spiritual battle that you face?

A. "I think that the spiritual battle is the same pretty much everywhere we go. We have the world, the flesh, and the devil to contend with. I think that there are also special temptations and stumbling blocks germane to each area of the world. In Cuba there tends to be also a lot of sexual tourism that has the population approaching each tourist for business."

Q. Are there particular Scriptures that you have used in doing spiritual warfare?

A. "In Cuba we have faced voodoo goddesses and a demon possessed person. The Scriptures as needed in each case have been different. With the Voodoo person it was merely cutting off her wrong rationalizations for doing what she was doing. She argued that she did this because she had to eat. By responding with the promises of God we were able to overcome the rationalizations. We shared that the Lord who did not spare His own Son was willing to give us along with Him everything we need. We shared the promise from Matt. 6:33 of seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness and food and raiment would be added unto us."

"With the demon possessed guy, he said he had powers to see things from the spiritual world we could not see. When we asked if he could "see" Jesus on the cross nailed and shedding His blood for him, he fled the scene."

⁶Tracy Putnam of the *International Mission Board*, interview by author, 20 April 2009, via email.

⁷Undisclosed name for security purposes, interview by author, 16 April 2009, via email.

Engaging in Warfare

From these five examples, we saw fear, physical roadblocks, pride, cynicism toward God, demonic territories, government and religious opposition, sexual temptation, and demon possession, among others—just some of innumerable tools the Enemy employs to stop the spread of the gospel around the world. So how can a JFBC short-term missionary battle the Enemy like these veterans? The purpose of this next section is to walk you through a process of equipping for battle. The case studies helped you understand the war we are called to fight. And now it's time to prepare for combat.

What You Must Know

"Winning in spiritual warfare always needs to begin with a right view of God and with a right view of what it means to be a child of God."⁸ Our understanding of God, Satan, and ourselves must be based on biblical truth if we are going to succeed in this war. Our preparation for combat will begin with a brief, yet very important theology lesson.

In the Star Wars films, the intergalactic battle is much more than good guys and bad guys shooting at each other from their "star cruisers." It is an intensely spiritual battle centered in "The Force," a mystical power that governs the universe. Some, such as Luke Skywalker, are controlled by the good side of "The Force." Others, such as Darth Vader, have given themselves over to the "Dark Side." These two sides are constantly fighting, as they jockey for advantage in the greater cosmic battle. Jedi Knights, who are the masters of the Force, often refer to maintaining "balance." Whether they will be able to keep this balance and thus prevent the Dark Side from growing too powerful, is one of the ongoing conflicts of the films.

At first glance, Star Wars may sound a lot like spiritual warfare. But in reality, it has little in common with what we are dealing with. This difference is fundamental to our effectiveness in fighting spiritual warfare.

In the Bible, God governs the entire universe. All things great and small are under his care, and nothing happens apart from his knowledge and permission, including sin. Somehow, for a greater purpose that we do not understand, God allowed sin to enter the world. It is a mystery: God is holy, he is sovereign, and yet sin exists with his permission.

Satan, formerly known as Lucifer, was once the most important angel in heaven. Yet, due to pride and a desire to be like God, he was cast out from heaven and forever banished along with 1/3 of the angels.⁹ In the mystery of God's sovereignty he allowed Satan and most of the fallen angels to have limited dominion over the earth for a season, whereas some were immediately cast into the abyss.¹⁰ With this power, Satan deceived Adam and Eve, humans created in the image of God, and the human race fell.

But God's plan for mankind was not thwarted. Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, came from heaven to become a man in order to conquer death once and for all. Christ's death and resurrection brought about the ultimate demise of Satan:

Central to our understanding of spiritual warfare is the cross...[Jesus'] obedience unto death rendered "powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14)...If our understanding of spiritual warfare does not see the cross as the final triumph, it is in error."¹¹

Spiritual warfare begins with the understanding that we face a defeated foe. Satan is a dangerous adversary, to be sure. But through Christ, we have nothing to fear, because the battle is already won.

Next we turn to our identity with Christ. As born-again believers, the importance of a biblical understanding of our identity cannot be overstated. God loves us, sent his only Son to die for us, and nothing can separate us from his love. Any attempt to earn his love is not only futile; it also has repercussions in warfare:

If we say that we are children of God by faith but believe that we have to earn our daily standing with God, we become the victims of an impossible situation. By grace God makes us "co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17)—a standing which we could never earn by our own efforts. Believing that this is indeed our position "in Christ" provides the only viable position from which to resist the enemy. The battle looks very different from the vantage point of the throne of God than it does from the context of the circumstances of our lives on earth.¹²

⁸ Warner, "Spiritual Warfare," 904.

⁹ Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 both describe Satan's fall.

¹⁰ C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*, revised and expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 233.

¹¹ Paul G. Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldviews," *Direction* 29/2 (2000): 122.

¹² Warner, "Spiritual Warfare," 904.

How You Must Prepare

Our position as God's children is secure, his love for us will never change, and nothing can separate us from him. And yet we still have some work to do:

The spiritual knowledge...must be applied within various spheres of responsibility and authority. This begins with our personal lives, extends to our families and church, and finally reaches to the world around us. Disciples have positional authority in Jesus. However, their experiential level of authority in spiritual warfare (application of authority in power) is determined by their level of surrender and obedience to the Lord Jesus.¹³

Although we have been given a new birth, the sin that remains in our flesh continues to wage war against the Spirit within us.¹⁴ If we have habitual or unconfessed sin in our lives, our effectiveness in defeating the enemy in spiritual combat is diminished. James, in his epistle, underscores this critical point:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)

From this passage, we see four things we must do if we are going to resist the devil.¹⁵ *First, we must submit to God.* It is not enough to attend church weekly. It is not enough to be in a Sunday Bible Study. We must first receive the Word and second, obey. If we are not in obedience to the Word of God, we are rendered ineffective for the battle.¹⁶

Second, we must draw near to God. The God we serve is more than a God who wants us to obey. He also wants us to know Him and be in fellowship with Him. "Obey" is not the first and greatest commandment; love is. How do we draw near to God? By seeking him in prayer. "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16). Prayer is fundamental to unleashing God's power in our lives. We must pray often, we must pray with persistence, we must daily linger in prayer. And this must be a consistent part of our lives before we ever engage in spiritual warfare on a short-term trip. The words of S.D. Gordon powerfully make this point:

The great people of the earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean people who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time and pray. They have not time. It must be taken from something else. This something else is important. Very important, and pressing, but still less important and less pressing than prayer.¹⁷

Third, we must cleanse our hands. By cleansing our hands, we focus on our actions. Examine yourself: Is there a brother or sister you need to reconcile with? Do you need to seek your spouse's forgiveness in some area?

Fourth, we must purify our hearts. By purifying our hearts we focus on our thoughts and motives. Is there a secret habitual sin you need to confess? Pursuing holiness requires cleansing. As Jesus instructed the disciples in John 13, even though our bodies are clean, our feet still need regular washing (John 13:10).

In summary, in terms of our position before God, we have been made righteous through Christ's atonement for our sins. Yet we must also pursue personal holiness through obedience of the Word, through a love relationship with God, and through living out purity in our thought life and relationships with others. Then we will be ready for battle on a short-term trip.

As Joshua prepared to lead the Israelites to cross the Jordan River and conquer the land, he issued a challenge: "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you" (Joshua 3:5). Likewise, as we prepare to do battle in enemy territory, we must consecrate ourselves if we hope to be used in the expansion of God's kingdom.

¹³ Randy Friesen, "Equipping Principles for Spiritual Warfare," *Direction* 29/2 (200): 145.

¹⁴ See Paul's description of this battle with the flesh in Romans 7.

¹⁵ The subsequent four points based on James 4:7-8 are from C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 108-113.

¹⁶ See Romans 12:2.

¹⁷ S.D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1941), 12-13; quoted in Chip Ingram, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 20006), 162.

Epilogue: What Happened?

A year after John's first mission trip, a friend convinced him to give short-term missions another shot. This time it was off to Central America with a medical team. Like the last trip, several meetings were scheduled. But unlike the last trip, spiritual preparation was the focus. Each of the three team meetings began with 30 minutes of worship and corporate prayer. Then several weeks prior to departure the team began a 21-day fast in which each of the 21 members set aside a day to fast and pray. In the final week prior to departure, John and the others were asked to submit the emails of ten "prayer partners" who would commit to pray daily for the team.

Once the team arrived on the field, the prayer emphasis continued. Activities began at six a.m. with a small group praying for other team members by name. Then after breakfast, the entire team met for a 30-minute time of praise and prayer before heading to the clinic. On sight, doctors and nurses prayed with every patient that was treated. Throughout the week, as urgent matters arose, the team pulled together to pray on the spot. Back at the hotel each evening, the team gathered once more for debriefing and another prayer time before bed. Then after the team dispersed, the leader sent a detailed prayer and praise email to the intercessors back home.

Upon his return home, John reflected on the difference between the two trips. Both were a real challenge. Both had all kinds of "curve balls" thrown their way. But the second trip was radically different in two ways. First, in spite of daily setbacks, the team remained unified and deep bonds of friendship and love were formed. Second, the team saw true life transformation—both in the salvation of many locals and in lives of the team members themselves. Not only did John learn a valuable lesson about the reality of spiritual warfare on a mission trip. He also realized that his normal life here at home should be no different.

