

Spiritual Warfare Series - Fighting Together

by Jim Cymbala

Spiritual warfare is real, and we're not alone in this fight; we can fight together with the help of intercession and prayer.

Duration: 31:38

Scripture: Ephesians 3:16

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story about a basketball game where he faced an opponent who had previously punched his friend. He describes how he outsmarted the opponent and made him fall, while the crowd cheered. The speaker then transitions to the topic of spiritual warfare, emphasizing the importance of supporting and helping others instead of simply critiquing them. He references a song about someone praying for you and highlights Jesus' intercession for believers. The speaker concludes by drawing parallels between physical warfare and spiritual warfare, emphasizing the need for unity and fighting together.

Transcript

We started a series on spiritual warfare, and now we're gonna talk about another aspect of spiritual warfare, which is the thought of fighting together. Our starting point has been Ephesians, the sixth chapter, which tells us more about spiritual warfare than any other part of the Bible, or at least it lists the pieces of armor that we're to put on. We really haven't gotten that deeply into that yet, but last week, we talked about the weapon of prayer, that in our battle with evil forces, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, invisible forces of darkness, headed up by Satan, and using demonic spirits and his craftiness, he has strategies for every one of us.

Spiritual warfare is very, very, very real. Unfortunately, it's a subject that we are not too candid in talking about, because it seems like it's gotten a stigma of something's wrong with you if you talk about the devil attacking you, because we've got a false positivism, a false sense of what spiritual life involves. We've got the wrong sense of victory.

We've got the wrong sense of being an overcomer. Being an overcomer means you fight a battle, and when you fight a battle, you have to fight the battle to be an overcomer. So instead of enlisting help from God and enlisting help from others, we kind of suffer alone sometimes, because we don't want to admit to someone we're going through a difficult time, but Paul uses his self, in first-person plural, and says, we

wrestle against principalities and powers.

We're all involved in it, and it is the hardest fight of all to fight. I'm gonna mention a kind of confrontation or battle that I once had in the athletic arena, and you can talk about wars, which makes that pale in comparison, but the greatest battles are fought inside a person's soul, inside a person's heart, with invisible forces attacking that young person, with invisible forces attacking that mother or father. It's intense.

It's hand-to-hand combat. The Bible tells us to be prepared for it. Last week, we learned that, beside the aspect of the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and what all that means, which I hope we can cover in the weeks to come, Lord willing, we found out that Paul talked about prayer.

So let's look at that in terms of one of the counteractive movements that we're to use against Satan when he attacks us. Let's look. And pray in the Spirit.

That means led by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, made fervent by the Spirit, on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. That means not only set times of prayer, alone to pray, pray with others, pray in the subway, pray in the bathroom, pray in the shower. We're to be instant in prayer.

Just always ready to talk to God. And request, with this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

Look at verse 19. Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. By the way, that just strikes me that for ministers and people who preach, that's a very interesting thought that Paul never used notes, it seems.

He says pray for me that when I open my mouth, well don't you know what you're gonna say? No, so pray for me so when I open my mouth, words will be given me on the spot. Isn't that a good promise from God? Tomorrow when you're facing someone and you feel like you should say something, you don't have to say what should I say, what should I say? Just open your mouth and start to talk and words will be given you by God. So you don't have to have a script or a notes and nothing wrong with those things for speakers who wanna use them, but it doesn't seem anybody in the New Testament ever referred to notes when they spoke.

Notice that he says not just pray for yourself, but pray for other Christians because they're going through the same fight you are. Not only pray for other Christians, pray for me. What, church in Ephesus, pray for the great apostle Paul? Yeah, I need it, he says.

I need it so that I can be what God wants me to be and I can do what God wants me to do. We're getting ready to go into the month of March and even though it was a long time ago, March always reminds me of March Madness, the NCAA tournament, the college basketball, which when I was captaining a team at the University of Rhode Island, we beat UConn in a playoff and ended up going to the NCAA tournament. And someone just at dinner the other day somehow got a article in the paper, I don't know where he got it, which was recollecting the fact that URI was playing Davidson, a school I think in North Carolina.

And the last time they had played was when we played against each other in the NCAA tournament. They mentioned my name and the outcome which we lost and who scored what. And I was jogging back my

memory to that time in my life because basketball was then my life, meant a lot to me.

I remember going to UConn for a playoff game. Well, before we went to the playoff game, we had to end the season playing UConn, which has always been a powerhouse and still is a powerhouse in basketball. And we were playing in Storrs, Connecticut at their court, which was very hard to beat them there.

Toward the end of the game, which we were gonna lose by, it turns out by nine or seven or nine points, they had a very chippy point guard who would do dirty things or provocative things on the court. And as the ball rolled out of bounds and he and one of my teammates were fighting for it, they rolled off the court. And what happened was he, without any warning, as the play went the other way, the ball went away, the ref wasn't looking, he went and punched my teammate and split his eyebrow and blood came out, but the ref didn't see it.

When the ref heard the commotion and turned, he saw my teammate trying to get at this guy and he threw my teammate out of the game, but not the guy who hit him. And then the ref got embarrassed because he threw my teammate out of the game who was bleeding and now he's walking off the court with blood all over him. We all ran to him.

We looked at the guy and exchanged pleasantries and God bless you and how's your family, that like that. We lost. Well, by losing, we now ended up tied.

And the winner, we both tied for first place, the winner was gonna go to the NCAA tournament. So they had to have a one game playoff. They flipped a coin on whose court it would be played at.

We wanted to be played at URI because home court is a big advantage. We flipped and lost and we had to play them three or four days later at UConn. On the bus going there with a lot of acid in your stomach, we talked together in the bus and in the locker room.

We all looked at each other and we said, we have your back. I have your back. They looked at me and said, Jimmy, I have your back.

We're gonna fight, win or lose, we're gonna fight together. We're gonna play as a team. That's the only way we'll be successful.

And we just, almost to the point of tears, just talked to each other and said, this is it. Okay, we're gonna do this thing. We did win the game and toward the end of the game, I picked up a loose ball and was racing down the court and who was the only guy between me and the basket, but the guy who had punched my friend.

That's the truth before God. What I'm telling you is the truth. There was a video, you could see it.

And as I came down the court, thinking of the time, 28, 30 seconds left, taking everything into accord, knowing what he thought I would do, I did something different and crossed over and went the other way and lo and behold, his feet got caught trying to adjust to what I was doing and he fell on his behind. Excuse the expression. And I went in and scored and there was this roar from the fans that were there.

I wasn't very sanctified then. And I ran right over to him on the ground and I looked down and I said, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. The point was, when you fight, you're not alone.

You're fighting with other people. When Paul wrote this letter, most commentators, they know he was in jail and he was looking at a soldier. And as he looked at the helmet and the sword and the belt and the shield, he started to, inspired by the Holy Spirit, put spiritual significance to those things.

But guess what? There was another soldier over there and then there was another because when the Roman army went to war, one soldier doesn't fight. You fight together. In fact, the Roman army was one of the first ones to get this way of building shields and being so close together that as they would walk, they would come at you like a phalanx of military personnel and no matter what you would shoot at them, they're just moving forward protecting one another.

So Paul tells us here, you're not fighting alone. You're fighting with other people. And he says, could you please remember to pray for the other people who are fighting and just don't make it about yourself? And he touches on a principle, which is intercession.

Last week, we talked about a wonderful way to spend time with the Lord or to start the day is to tell Jesus something, tell God something about himself. That's wonderful, which is called praise and worship. To tell God how faithful he is, to tell God how merciful he's been, how patient he's been with you, how he's been so tender, such a good friend.

Then tell God something about your own life that you need, where you hurt, where someone's wounded you, where you feel the enemy coming in against you. And then, more specifically, talk to God about the day you face. Where are the challenges? What are you anxious about? What are we worried about? Where do we need extra grace, it seems? What meeting do we have? What encounter do we have to have lunch with someone? We're trying to win them maybe to the Lord.

Oh God, give me wisdom. And you pray through the day. Talk to Jesus about the day.

But now, Paul is talking about something else. He's not talking about you telling God about anything about yourself. He's talking about talking to God about another person.

Intercession is when you touch God with one hand and you touch Brandon with the other hand in prayer. You talk to God not about yourself. You talk to God about Brandon.

That's intercession. Paul says, and pray for me, and pray for me. Now, what's interesting, Paul wouldn't ask that unless he knew he was in the habit of always praying for the people he was writing to and he loved.

This is probably the greatest failing of all ministers of the gospel today. They teach, they counsel, they reason, they do whatever, they organize. But where we're missing, and it's a failing of mine, which I wanna confess, I've practiced it, but I know it's a failing of mine, is to pray for the people that God has put you around, that you're the shepherd.

Look at these passages. In the same book of Ephesians, Paul says, for this reason, I kneel before the Father and I pray, out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. Just look at that.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father. I pray for you, that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you. I'm not praying for myself now, I'm praying for you, that he may strengthen you with what? Through his Spirit in your innermost being.

So Paul says, I can't teach you that. You can't teach strength. I can't teach strength to anyone.

Strength is not taught. Christianity is not a teaching religion like Mormonism and the Jehovah Witnesses. There is a teaching element in it, but Christianity is a supernatural religion.

It's about the Holy Spirit living in me, the Holy Spirit controlling me, the Holy Spirit producing fruit in me. It's about the Holy Spirit convicting the world of sin. It's a religion of the dynamic power of God.

And Paul says, I can teach you things. I can create appetite. I can instruct you in certain things.

But look, when it's all said and done, I am kneeling before God and I am praying that he will strengthen you. I don't want you weak, I want you strong. And the only one who can make you strong is God.

And the only thing I can do about that is to pray that God will make you strong. Just think of that. And that's just, not just the church in Ephesus.

Look to the church in Thessalonica. Night and day, we, he and his associates, we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. And now he's praying again.

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. He's saying, I just don't write you letters. I just didn't teach and preach and collect the love offering from you.

What I do is I pray for you. I pray for you, I intercede for you. How he knew all the names, obviously he couldn't remember all the names, but in some way, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he collectivized those people and he put them in a group where he could bring them before God and say, God, have mercy on them, strengthen them, make them strong, make their lives pure and holy.

God, please work in those people. And that is something that a lot of pastors is just about writing books and preaching sermons, but intercession for people is something that doesn't seem to be a top priority for a lot of ministers, at least the ones I talk to. But if you really love someone, you pray for them.

Do you not? If you love your children, what do you do? You pray for your children. If you love your grandchildren, what do you do? You pray for your grandchildren, you pray for your wife, you pray for whomever. To the church at Rome, again, talking about his ministry to them.

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times. I mean, Paul was some kind of intercessor. He not only wrote letters and evangelized, he took time to pray for churches and for people that made up those churches.

And I have done that for you, but I have not done it like I should. I confess that before God and I ask him to forgive me. The people closest to me know that I love you more than anybody else in the world.

I don't wanna be anywhere else. I don't wanna go to any other church. I'll serve God where he wants me to.

I don't wanna meet anyone famous. I just wanna hang out with you. That's the truth before God.

But I need to pray more for you because no matter how I teach, no matter how I preach, no matter how we try to do things without the blessing of God on you that is secured sometimes only by prayer, you're not

gonna enjoy the fulfillment of God's purpose and plan for your life like he wants you to. And it's upon us leaders that we pray for you, not just talk to you, but that all of us pastors that we pray and the deacons and the deaconesses that we pray for you. And then, of course, the reverse is true.

As we saw in Ephesians 6, Paul was saying, I want you to pray for me, but I just covered how he prayed for them. Did you know that it's so easy to criticize people and judge people? It's another thing to pray for people. I have been around all my life people who think it's spiritual to judge people.

All my life, from the littlest boy that I was, it is somehow ingrained in people that to talk about people behind their back and point out their faults, that's somehow spiritual. It's more demonic because Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. So when you're accusing people of what's wrong with them and pointing out their faults even behind their back, what good does that do? Who does that help? Does it help the person? Does it help you? No, it poisons your own spirit.

It grieves the Holy Spirit. How much better would all of us be when we see weakness in someone we don't point it out, but we intercede for them? And we say, Almighty God, God, you know how many faults I have. Who in the world can I judge? Who in the world can I point out a fault in? God, let me intercede and pray.

But this is from time immemorial, especially in the so-called Pentecostal movement, and other movements too. Discernment is somehow really a critical spirit, just pointing out what's wrong with people. And somehow that's spiritual.

I talked with someone recently who said they were angry with someone, and they said, I just feel a check in my spirit. I can't let that go. I feel a check in my spirit.

So I said, oh, that's interesting. So now you're saying God is the one who's giving you that. That anger and unforgiveness, God's giving you that.

No, you're wrong. What you have is anger and unforgiveness. And instead of admitting that and praying for the person, you can't do it, because when you're angry and bitter with someone, you cannot pray for them.

You cannot pray for people that you have ought against. It's impossible. So Paul is telling the church here in Ephesus and other churches that he wrote to, listen, I love you so much, I pray for you.

I pray for you. I intercede for you. Now, he's inspired by the Holy Spirit, so it must be that when you pray for people, it must work.

There must be power in this, because why would he do it? Why pray for people if there's no payoff at the end? So there must be a tremendous promise from God that when you intercede for somebody, God is gonna react, because a lot of times, people are in a position, they're not praying for themselves, don't you get it? Satan beats some people down so bad, they can't pray for themselves, and if they can't pray for themselves, who's gonna pray for them if not you and I? Haven't you ever been beaten down when you can't pray? How many have ever been so beaten down, you can't pray for yourself? When my wife wrote that great song, He's Been Faithful to Me, the many times I could not pray. Well, you should pray. Don't you know God is on the throne? You should, come on, be real.

When the enemy attacks sometimes, he snuffs out, as it were, your very life. That's why intercession is so important, because when Pastor Hammond is beat down and he can't pray for himself, God's gonna put it

on my heart to pray for him, and God's gonna answer and lift him up, not because of his prayer, because of my prayers. Can we put our hands together and say amen? Paul not only tells them how he prayed for them, but now he wants them to pray for him.

Just think of that. He coveted their prayers. Paul, come on.

You saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. You're writing a third of the New Testament. You're the greatest apostle, probably the greatest Christian the world's ever seen.

You need people's prayers? That's another thing. We are so, God have mercy, God forgive us, and God forgive me. We are so slow to ask people to pray for us, because we're so stinking proud.

That's what the truth is. We'll talk for a moment, okay? We're proud. We're feeling that's a sign of weakness, to really mean it, and say pray for me.

Pray for me. I need it. But look how Paul talked.

Look. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. I'm in a struggle.

I'm trying to preach and start churches, and the devil's attacking on every hand. Could you please pray for me? Yeah, I know you're just a lay person, and I'm the great apostle, but would you please just pray for me? And one other place. Second Corinthians.

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers. You gotta help us by your prayers.

You gotta help us by your prayers. There must be power in this. There must be so much power in intercession that Satan wants to block it, and a lot of us who do develop some kind of prayer life, it's usually just about us, or our family and our loved ones, and beyond that, hey, you gotta take care of your own business, but that's not the Christianity of the Bible.

It's like in that bus and in that locker room before that game. I have your back. I have your back.

And did you know that when you pray together and you intercede and you fight together in prayer, it makes a bond that's incredible? Isn't that true, guys who have played sports? Whenever you do something athletically with guys and you fight together in sports, even though you are separated, the minute you meet them because of that bond, you're right back where you were. My wife, a few weeks ago, walked in my office at the end of a Sunday and said, I'm bringing in two people to see you, and it was a guy who played on the basketball team with me at Erasmus Hall High School, and his wife live in New Jersey. Asked my wife and the people who were in the room.

He walked in. He said, Jimmy. I said, George.

We hugged. We started talking like nothing had ever stopped between us. Why? Because when you fight together, when you bond together, and when you say, devil, over my dead body are you gonna have my brother, my sister? No, that makes a bond.

That's why there's a lack of unity in a lot of churches because they don't pray together. You can't teach unity. You can't teach racial reconciliation.

What a joke that is. I've been approached 100 times to write articles or books or people in conferences say, talk about racial reconciliation because we visited your church and we see your choir and all the people are from everywhere. So how did you teach that? I said, I never said a word about it to anybody.

Have I ever said a word about it to anybody? Because when you pray together and just love each other, God does all the work. Come on, let's praise him out loud. Did you know someone's praying for you right now? No, no, no.

I said, someone's praying for you. You know who? Ah, not many of you know this verse in Hebrews. Hebrews 7.25, look at it.

Therefore he, Jesus, as our high priest is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them. Did you know where Jesus is right now? At the right hand of the Father, making intercession for you and I. He's not praying for himself. He's not saying, oh, Father, bless me, help me through the Jordan River, help me on the cross.

No, that's all over. He now lives for only one thing, to intercede for you and I. When he calls us to pray for other people, we're joining him in the thing that he's doing right now. Jesus is right now engaged in intercession.

And when you wake up tomorrow morning and the devil is plotting what he's gonna do, Jesus is already praying for you. He's making intercession. When you and I flop and fail, he's, no, Father, Father, be patient, be merciful.

Remember, I died for them, Father. Father, give more mercy. Let me teach him some lessons.

He's ever living to make intercession for us. So I wanna ask God to forgive me for not praying for you more. I do pray for you and God knows how much I love you.

But I need to pray for you more and I ask God to help me starting today to spend more time just praying for you. But, Pastor, you don't know my name. I can lift you up and God will know who needs what.

I can just lift you up. I think you need to pray more for me. I wonder when the last time some of you prayed for me was.

Or Pastor Delene or Pastor Petraeus, Pastor Hammond, or the deacons and the leaders that God has put in the church. No, it's just, oh, listen, I want God Almighty to smash any kind of critical spirit anyone has in this place. If you see something wrong, don't point it out, pray.

Anybody can point it out. Anybody can, quote, see through people. How about see through yourself? And how about say, who am I helping by critiquing everybody? You know, that used to really get to me because I lived in a dorm at Rhode Island.

And I remember I would, you know, I didn't join a fraternity, so I'd be in a dorm. So in the morning, I'd be just with my bathrobe on and I'd be going down to the bathroom, take a shower, shave, and all of that. And guys would see me in the hallway or in the bathroom, in the shower, and they would say, let's say we had a game the night before, and they would say, yo, Jim, why'd you throw the ball away then? When you were driving down, you threw, you thought the guy was there, you lost the ball, or you missed that shot.

Man, I thought you should have made that shot. And they would say sometimes something like that. And I would say to them, after I couldn't take anymore, they would, you know, critiquing everything, I'd say, hey, did you ever play? Did you ever play? What do you think, it's a bed of roses out there, guys clawing at you, guys seven foot, 6'11 coming at you, running over you, guys hawking you, trying to steal the ball, the pressure of the moment, everything going a million miles a minute.

It's easy to sit on the sidelines and critique people. Get out and play and tell me how good it is. Listen, if you can do better, go out and play.

Then they got all quiet, and that's the way it is in spiritual warfare. Anybody can critique anybody, but can you help somebody? You remember that song we used to sing? Someone is praying for you. Could you play it? Know that someone is praying for you.

When it seems you're all alone, and you don't know what to do, remember someone is praying for you. Jesus, I thank you that you make intercession for us, Jesus. I thank you, Jesus, that you are interceding for us.

Even this morning, you were interceding for me. While I was preaching, you were interceding. Thank you that you ever lived to make intercession.

Help us to see the power of it. Help us to get the heart of it. Help us to join you in interceding for others, not critiquing them, not criticizing them, not throwing them away, but praying for them, for you, the one who said, bless those that curse you, pray for them, who are mean to you, because then we would be imitating your great heart of love.

Let the peace of God, which passes all understanding, fill all our hearts today. Holy Spirit, remind us of this word during this week. On Tuesday, let us have a great time of intercession, praying down blessings on family and non-family.

We thank you that you've given us this awesome power in you to pray, and you'll hear an answer. Help us to love each other more. Break down every barrier, racial, ethnic, whatever, however, hurts, wrongs, misunderstandings, break it all down.

And the choir behind me, the people in front of me, Lord, help us to love each other from the heart fervently, for we ask this in Jesus' name. And everyone said. Amen.

All the ladies, I want you to hug six ladies and say, I love you with the love of the Lord. Brothers, hug about six brothers. Say, I love you with the love of the Lord.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24795.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/spiritual-warfare-series-fighting-together/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net