A Parents’ Guide to Spiritual Warfare
Equipping Your Kids to Win the Battle

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of spiritual warfare is a double-edged sword within the church, the Body of Christ. On one side, when taken to an extreme, it gives the impression that there is a demon behind every bush, waiting to attack innocent bystanders at a moment’s notice. On the other side of the blade, it is brushed off and not even considered as a legitimate spiritual issue that needs any concern. Both views are wrong.

The Bible points to the necessity of spiritual warfare. First Peter 5:8 warns us, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Scripture also points to other significant aspects of the spiritual battle apart from the devil—namely, our flesh (that is, our own desires) and the world. Collectively, we can see clearly that spiritual warfare is a battle against the enemy of our souls, our own desires, and the continual onslaught from a sinful world. To completely ignore or to concentrate solely on only one of these three aspects is to minimize the necessity of warfare and to put ourselves and family members at risk of falling into sin and a web of deceit that will inevitably cause emotional pain and spiritual death.

The Bible’s clear warnings on the topic of spiritual warfare are not meant to breed fear but to empower us as God’s children and as parents. Nowhere does this battle become more evident than in the lives of children today as they are assaulted twenty-four hours a day from every angle. But we need not succumb to a barrage of attacks or give up when we or our children come face to face with opposition. Instead, we have been given the authority and tools to stand against the Evil One on behalf of ourselves and our families through the One who made it possible to do so: Jesus Christ.

When I became a believer in the fall of 1993, my children, Charlene and Paul, were nine and eight years old respectively. Prior to my conversion, I had engaged in numerous ungodly activities far
from my new Christian beliefs. At times it was a difficult transition. As a child, alcoholism, sexual abuse, paganism, and self-hatred were part of my daily reality. They were all aspects of my heritage that had been intricately woven by generations before me. Children learn what they’re taught; so it was only natural for me as a budding teen to engage in goddess-worship, cultism, spiritualism, and a hodgepodge of various organized religions, and to pass this ungodly heritage on to my children. When I gave my life to Jesus Christ as my Savior, I rocked my family tree so hard in the spirit realm, it caused a perpetual earthquake in my home. My children rebelled, some of my family disowned me, and others relentlessly mocked my newfound faith. I was totally unprepared spiritually for what was transpiring in my world.

Within a week of my conversion I bought a book at a yard sale written by Dr. Ed Murphy called *The Handbook on Spiritual Warfare*. What seemed like a chance discovery was really God’s intervention. I knew even then that the spirit realm existed because I’d grown up indulging in its demonic aspect through cultism and paganism. So to find a book from the biblical perspective was like finding a spiritual pot of gold.

I devoured Dr. Murphy’s book in conjunction with the Bible and immediately began intervening in the spirit realm on my own behalf and that of my children. I was a single parent, so it was a battle I waged on my own. I spent hours at night when they were sleeping, kneeling next to their beds, praying silently over them. I spoke out every sin I could think of that I’d unwittingly subjected them to in my unsaved state. I renounced all aspects of my involvement in cultism and earnestly asked the Holy Spirit to fill the void that was created when these curses were broken. My children’s hearts slowly changed, and I saw their hearts soften and develop a love for Jesus. But my battle didn’t end there.

As Charlene and Paul grew and matured into adolescence, they continually struggled with a combination of their own desires, peer pressure from their friends, and direct assaults from the enemy of their souls. As a result, their faith wavered. I hadn’t ceased to intervene for them; so I questioned if God was still listening to me as I interceded on their behalf. That’s when the Holy Spirit prompted me to empower
them to intervene on their own. It was a light bulb moment. After all, it was natural for me to teach them independent living skills in other areas of their lives—why would it be different spiritually?

The core reality of this entire situation was twofold. First, I came to the knowledge that I am not my children’s Savior. Let me explain. As parents we often unwittingly create an environment where we are exalted in our children’s eyes. Having respect for one’s parents and heeding their advice is an important aspect of healthy growth and development for a child, but if we don’t teach them the truth, which is that we will fail them and God won’t, we set them up for failure. As a Christian parent, it was important to me that they be able to come to me, share their struggles, pray with me, and allow me to pray for them, but I needed to pass the baton and empower them to do so for themselves, learning that they can place their trust in God himself. This was vital because they would eventually leave home and the spiritual umbrella of safety that a godly parent provides and live life on the front line themselves. I would not always be accessible to them for support and encouragement or be able to hold their hands up when they grew weary, but God would never leave them or forsake them. Additionally, my resources for helping them would always be limited, but God’s are not.

The second reality was that they had allowed certain strongholds into their lives by succumbing to sin, and thus they were the ones who had to renounce their involvement, repent, and ask the Holy Spirit to reside in place of the stronghold. In other words, they let the sin in the doors of their hearts, and they had to kick it out. As parents, our children’s own will can come against our spiritual intervention. Jesus asked the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda a crucial question when the invalid (meaning weak, sick, ill) asked for healing. He said, “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6). The seemingly obvious answer to that question is yes, but not all people want to be healed from the pleasures of sin. That’s why Satan is called the Deceiver—he misleads us to believe that the sin we are engaged in is fun and pleasurable, not enslaving and leading to death.

Parents are not hopeless in this situation, but we are limited by our children’s will. We will discuss this further in a future chapter.
point is that it is vital to give our children the necessary discipleship at an early age. This will help them develop trust and intimacy with their Savior. Thus when they experience conviction they will run into the arms of Jesus rather than running away from him in guilt and shame. Running and hiding from God only breeds more sin.

I wish I could honestly say that both my children have excelled in the areas listed above. In certain aspects they have done very well. In others they still struggle. Although they are both adults now, and one has children of her own, we all continue to apply the biblical tools for combating the brutal attack against our souls. We must remember, though, that spiritual warfare is not a one-day conflict but rather a lifetime battle that we will be engaged in until we die.

I will forever be grateful for discovering Dr. Murphy’s book. His work, as well as other books on spiritual warfare, specifically those of friend and colleague Neil Anderson, have helped me see that the spiritual realm not only exists but is active in everyone’s life. Time and again these books have taken me to God’s Word, which clearly states that we are at war against the world, Satan, and our flesh, but that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

The demonic strongholds that gripped me since my childhood have released their grasp on my life. In their place is the peace, love, joy, and freedom available in Christ. As a result I’ve tried adamantly to teach my children the same principles in the hope that they too will train their children to be warriors on behalf of the army of God. I am blessed that the Lord has called me to share with others how to stand against the forces of evil.

This book is the product of years of intense personal study, experience, and collaboration with other ministry leaders. Its purpose is to equip you to walk in freedom, to intervene on your children’s behalf, and to teach them to do the same—creating a spiritual heritage for your future grandchildren and so on.

Many fine parenting books will teach you how to discipline your children, how to raise them as responsible adults, and even how to instill morals into their lives. But none of those things have value if your child falls by the spiritual wayside. As a parent, you have a biblical responsibility to intercede in the lives of your children in the spirit
realm and to teach your children how to stand against the fiery darts that assault them twenty-four hours a day. Our children have been born “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14), and it is our role as parents to equip them for the battle at hand through the saving, intervening, and conquering power found only in Jesus Christ.
For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

_Jeremiah 29:11_

Jeremiah 1:5 tells us that before our children were conceived and formed in their mother’s womb, God knew them. And Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God’s plans for our children are for good and not for evil, to prosper them and to give them a hope and a future. If that’s truly the case, then why do the following statistics paint a very different picture?

- Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth through twelfth grade students dropped out of school each year without successfully completing a high school program.¹
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages fifteen to twenty-four. In 2001, 3,971 suicides were reported in this age group.²
- In 1999 law enforcement officers arrested an estimated 2.5 million juveniles.³
- One million teenage girls get pregnant each year.⁴
A PARENTS’ GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- Seven in ten young offenders in 1997 were convicted for violent offenses.\(^5\)

- By the eighth grade, 52 percent of adolescents have consumed alcohol, 41 percent have smoked cigarettes, and 20 percent have used marijuana.\(^6\)

- Twelve percent of eighth graders, 22 percent of tenth graders, and 28 percent of twelfth graders consider themselves heavy drinkers and have consumed five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks.\(^7\)

- Twenty percent of youths fifteen to eighteen years old report self-mutilation (without an intent to commit suicide), head banging, repetitive self-biting, skin picking, hair pulling, skin cutting, skin carving, and skin burning.\(^8\)

- Currently it is estimated that adolescents (thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds) account for up to one-fifth of all rapes and one-half of all cases of child molestation committed each year.\(^9\)

- In 1995 youths were involved in 15 percent of all forcible rapes—approximately 18 adolescents per 100,000 were arrested for forcible rape. In the same year, approximately 16,100 adolescents were arrested for sexual offenses excluding rape and prostitution.\(^10\)

- According to the National Youth Suicide Prevention Center in Washington, D.C., every hour of every day approximately 228 teenagers in the U.S. attempt to take their lives.

These are just a few statistics that reflect the glaring problems of today’s youth. The biggest tragedy in all this is that there is not much difference between believers and nonbelievers. Violent crimes committed by youths, suicide, self-mutilation, and alcohol and drug abuse are as rampant in Christian homes as in non-Christian homes. These numbers reflect battles lost in the spirit realm.

If the Bible is correct (which it is), and if God’s plans for our children are good, prosperous, and hopeful (which they are), then why do the statistics regarding our children depict a completely different picture?

We can blame the problems of today’s youth on many external influences. Television, peer pressure, accessibility to unhealthy choices, and music are just a few. But the truth be known, all exter-
nal behavior is a proclamation of an internal belief. In other words, while our children’s behavior can be influenced externally, the core beliefs that they have about themselves, others, God, Satan, and their purpose in life are what ultimately shape their decision-making process.

Few Christian parents would disagree that their children’s faith should be reflected in their choices. Isn’t that the way we as parents live our own lives? Our convictions about God and his Word make up the rudder that sets a course to healthy decision-making. The truth is, if we made decisions based solely on our biblical convictions, we’d all live close to perfect lives. The problem that exists, and has existed for thousands of years, is the ever-present sin nature that resides in all of us. We mix our convictions in the same bowl with a sin nature that rages out of control, and that leads to spiritual casualties and fatalities. However, when our convictions are blended with submission to Christ, victory and success will follow.

The first step in preparing for battle and teaching our children to do the same is to honestly evaluate our current spiritual state. We cannot step into spiritual combat without a clear understanding of where we stand in our beliefs about God, his Word, our purpose in life, and Satan. The best way to examine where children stand is to ask them, and that’s exactly what George Barna of the Barna Group did. He surveyed thirteen-year-olds nationally in an attempt to assess what they had learned and retained about God during their adolescent years. What he found was both encouraging and startling.

First, the good news:

• Nine out of ten young people consider themselves to be Christian by the age of thirteen, with 32 percent receiving Christ as their Savior between the ages of five and twelve, 4 percent in the thirteen to eighteen age range, and 6 percent in the nineteen plus range.

This research shows us that if our children do not embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior before they reach their teenage years, the chance of their doing so at all is slim. Even more so, it shows that nine out of ten children are being exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is great news! Further studies aren’t as encouraging. They show that these same children’s theological beliefs are vague at
best, revealing that while we may be good at initially reaching our children, we aren’t as efficient in educating them. Three-quarters believe the following:

- The devil does not exist—Satan is just a symbol of evil.
- A good person earns entry into heaven by doing enough good works.
- People are born morally neutral and make a choice as to whether they will become good or bad.
- All of the sacred books from different religious traditions (the Bible, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and so forth) are merely different expressions of the same spiritual truths and principles.
- Spiritual and moral truths can only be discovered through logic, human reason, and personal experience.

Two-thirds believe the following:

- Praying to deceased saints can have a positive effect on your life.
- The Bible discourages sin but never describes it as an innate disposition.

Half or more contended the following:

- Life either has no meaning, or the meaning is realized through hard work, which produces the resources to enjoy comfort and security.
- There are no absolute standards for morals and ethics.
- Life is either a random series of acts or predetermined, but we have no real say in how our lives unfold.
- When Jesus Christ lived on earth, he committed sins.
- The Bible does not specifically condemn homosexuality.¹¹

Maybe you’re as shocked about these statistics as I was the first time I read them. I thought to myself, What are we teaching our children? But when I dug a little deeper, research showed me that we are teaching them exactly what we as their parents believe! These same core beliefs about God, our purpose, the Bible, and Satan are held by an equal number of adults (sometimes more). The reality is that some of us believe these lies ourselves, and just as we have spiritually dog-paddled through life with our heads barely above water, we have raised like-minded children. This is a spiritual catastrophe.

In his book Transforming Our Children into Spiritual
Champions, George Barna wisely advises parents about being spiritually fit. “When it comes to raising children to be spiritually mature, the old adage, ‘you can’t give what you don’t have,’ is pertinent for millions of families. Most parents proclaim that the spiritual nurturing of their children is their job, but are very happy to let their church shape the child’s faith. Unfortunately, no matter how hard a church tries, it is incapable of bringing a child to complete spiritual maturity: that is the job of the family.”

I believe you have picked up this book because you want to raise godly children before the Lord. I further believe you love your children and want what’s best for them—you want them to succeed in standing against the attacks of the world and Satan, to submit their sin nature and will to God, and to live the life of freedom found only in Jesus Christ. But I want to be honest and up-front with you about the gospel of Jesus Christ and spiritual warfare. If you do not have a firm biblical foundation regarding Jesus Christ, Satan, your purpose, the Bible, and the battle at hand, you will be continually defeated in life (which is external evidence of spiritual defeat) and ultimately will be of little value in helping your children learn the necessary tools to live a life of freedom themselves. Jesus spoke of this very problem in Matthew 7:24-27:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

The first step in helping your child is educating yourself. It is through your example that your children will learn the most. It is through your knowledge and confidence in Christ that the seeds of promise that God has made in his Word will bloom. Evidence of intimacy with Jesus in your own life will breed a desire for spiritual inti-
macy in the life of your child. When your children see you facing life’s challenges from a spiritual standpoint and overcoming those challenges in Christ, they will naturally come to you with questions about how they, too, can overcome. As you taste freedom in your own daily battles, your children will desire to feast on the liberty of Christ also. Additionally, as you stand against the attacks of the enemy and become empowered through Christ, you will share these spiritual triumphs with your kids.

Be prepared, fellow parents, because if your children see that life’s challenges are overcoming you, rather than your overcoming them, they will gravitate toward the world’s way of coping, which inevitably leads to enslavement and spiritual death. Psalm 103:17 tells us that the Lord’s love is with those who fear and honor him in their lives, and that when we as parents walk in his righteousness, his love is handed down not only to our children but to our grandchildren! That’s a powerful promise for generations yet to come!

GOD’S DESIRE FOR OUR CHILDREN

I started this chapter with Jeremiah 1:5 and 29:11, which tell us that God knew our children before they were formed in their mother’s womb and that he has great plans to give them a hope and a prosperous future. Scripture defines what our children’s futures look like when their lives are submitted to him:

- God’s Son, Jesus Christ, will be reflected in their lives (Galatians 4:19).
- Our children, whom God refers to as seeds of righteousness, will be delivered from the attacks of Satan (Proverbs 11:21; Matthew 6:13).
- They will have great peace in their lives through the teachings of the Lord (Isaiah 54:13).
- They will develop discernment of good and evil and will have a good conscience (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Peter 3:21).
- They will have knowledge of God’s laws engraved in their minds and on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10).
- They will choose companions who are wise, not fools, nor sex-
The Necessity of Warfare

ually immoral, nor drunkards, nor idolaters, nor slanderers, nor swindlers (Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 5:11).

• They will remain sexually pure and will keep themselves only for their spouse, asking God for his grace to keep such a commitment (Ephesians 5:3, 31-33).

• They will honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

God has many more plans for our children outlined in his Word. As you read and share the Bible with your children, write them down together. Doing so will ensure that you both understand God’s promises and expectations and know what blessings they can expect to receive in the future as they walk in God’s will. The Bible has over thirty thousand promises for believers who walk righteously. It is our job as parents to teach our children by example and through our words how to live according to God’s Word. In doing so, we are promised that when our children are grown, they will not turn away from the truth (Proverbs 22:6).
NOTES


2. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Suicide: Fact Sheet, Youth.


4. Rebecca A. Maynard, Kids Having Kids, Robin Hood Foundation.


