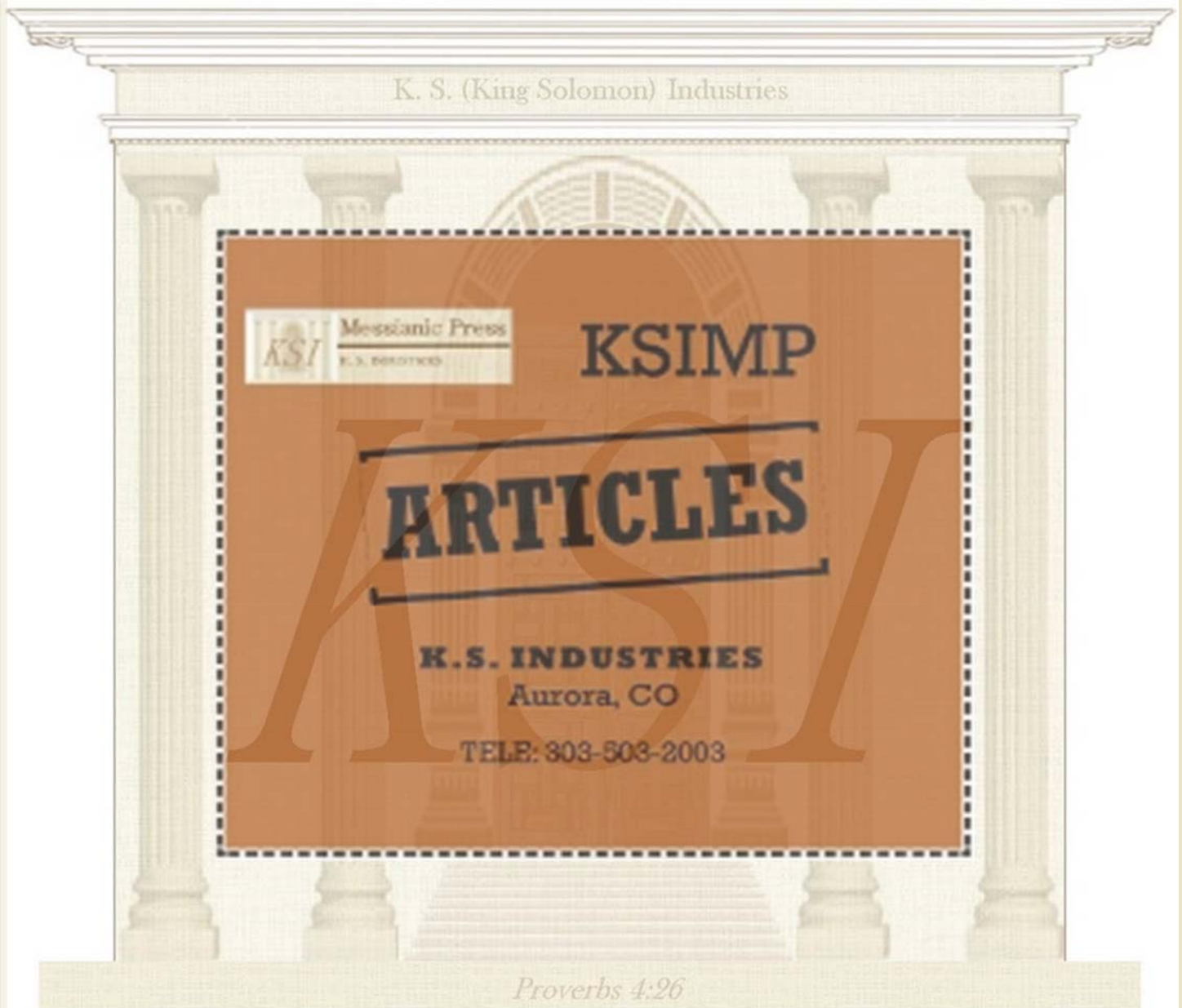


Spiritual Warfare

Motivated to Prayer

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VANITA LYNN WARREN

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*“And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.
With this in mind be alert and always keep praying for all the saints.”
Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)*

I understood the necessity for prayer. Prayer meant talking to God about how I feel, thanking Him for blessings, and asking Him to help me in time of need. I acknowledged that my prayer life could use improvement—everyone’s can, but overall I thought my prayers were sufficient.

Hindered by Fear

In 1996, friends strongly urged me to read the novel, *This Present Darkness*, by Frank Peretti. When told it was about angels, demons and spiritual warfare, I declined their suggestion. Spiritual warfare? Not me! That was somewhere I had no desire to go. Fearing the Devil like the plague, over the years I continued to dismiss the idea of reading any such books. I convinced myself that spiritual warfare meant treading on Satan's turf, and I wasn't going anywhere near it.

Nudged by the Spirit

Then, a friend called and the issue of spiritual warfare came up again. I explained that for years, Christians encouraged me to learn more about spiritual warfare, but I was never comfortable in that arena. My motto was, “If I leave Satan alone, he’ll leave me alone.” During the conversation, she alluded to the fact that understanding spiritual warfare would change my prayer life. Her comment puzzled me. I didn’t see the connection. Angels, demons, and prayer life? What does one have to do with the other? Immediately, the Holy Spirit moved on my heart, and I knew it was time for me to step into this uncharted territory. The Spirit of God pointed out my disobedience, and that afternoon I purchased Frank Peretti's novel, prayed over it, and began reading. To my surprise, I did want to put the book down. With each moment of spare time, I perused the spiritual battle waged in those pages. Not only did the book **not** frighten me; I was amazed at world that came into view. I also began reading other Christian resources on spiritual warfare, such as C. S. Lewis', *The Screwtape Letters*; Charles H. Spurgeon's, *Satan: A Defeated Foe*; and Dr. Ed Murphy's, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*. What I learned in the process completely changed my prayer life, my attitude toward prayer, and my understanding of prayer's relationship to angels and demons.

A Changed Prayer Life

I learned that a battle, in which I am an active yet unwitting participant, wages daily on my behalf. I learned that for many years, I enabled Satan to influence me away from the truth about him, and I empowered him by not defeating his tactics through prayer. I learned that by misunderstanding the spiritual battle waging around me, I was less effective in interceding for fellow believers in need. I was insensitive to the Holy Spirit, and I quenched Him and His efforts through my lackadaisical attitude towards prayer. I also absorbed the possibility that I was making it more difficult for His angels to do their work because I was disobedient in my prayer life. I was ignorant and unaware of the necessity and timing of prayer. Subsequently, I came to the realization that just because Satan was out of sight and seemingly out of mind; he was still very active in my life and the lives of others I came into contact with.

With my new grasp on prayer, I wanted assurance I was on the right track in my understanding. What did Scripture say about prayer and spiritual warfare? I turned to Ephesians chapter six. In verses

11-17, Paul exhorted us to put on the armor of God before going into battle. However, in verse 18, he specifically commanded us to “pray always.” The more I studied, I realized I had completely misunderstood the importance and necessity of prayer in waging spiritual warfare. Prayer is spiritual warfare. My understanding of prayer was weak and void of substance. I began to see that my prayer life was lax, self-centered, and possibly—if not for the grace of God—ineffective. However, that wasn't all, Scripture had more to say on the subject.

Daniel's Patience in Prayer

I never considered what angels were or were not doing. Most angels in the Bible are unnamed and hard to identify with. I knew that Michael is a warrior angel, and that Gabriel runs around giving messages to "special" people. That was it for me. Angels had their job and I had mine. I didn't consider my prayers could affect angels or that angels would affect me, but God changed my heart. Though familiar with the book of Daniel, I missed the importance of what the Spirit was now about to teach me.

*“A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. **Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.** But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me **twenty-one days.** Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia”.*

[Emphasis added] Daniel 10:10-13 (NIV)

As result of Daniel's petition, a spiritual battle ensued. Daniel did not get an answer to his prayer for “twenty-one days.” I felt humbled and ashamed as I remembered times when I fell into discouragement and despair because God didn't appear to answer my prayers as fast as I wanted Him to. I believe God answers prayers, but I didn't know others were involved in obtaining those answers. I didn't understand that prayer affected the spiritual realm. My focus was selfish. I was expecting a tangible "end-result" answer—not considering what may have occurred in between. The angel struggled twenty-one days to get to Daniel. He couldn't get away until another angel—Michael—was sent to help him with the demons in Persia. Not only that, after answering Daniel's prayer, the angel had to return to continue to fight the prince of Persia (Daniel 10:20). Daniel's prayer actually interrupted what an angel was doing elsewhere. I never noticed this example of what God's messengers do, through our prayers, on our behalf. This particular passage is one example of how spiritual warfare is directly affected and influenced by our prayers. It also taught me that prayer requires faith and patience, and I should not become discouraged. *“Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1:4).

A New Perspective

In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul says, *“The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* I had been a Christian for 18 years, and never really understood prayer. I only thought I did. I allowed fear to keep me from understanding spiritual warfare, I rejected God's counsel and instruction suggested through other believers, and I frustrated my prayer life. Had I been

obedient 14 years ago when the opportunity first presented itself, I would have long since understood that spiritual discernment, growth, and warfare are irrevocably linked to the act of prayer.

Today, prayer is the language through which I speak directly to God, and it opens the lines of communication through which He responds back to me. For me, prayer is no longer asking for this or thanking Him for that. Prayer is my most intimate spiritual weapon. Prayer is my means to wage war in a realm that I cannot see with my eyes. Prayer gives me peace about my circumstances and the different trials that come my way. Prayer is my gift to those I love and the world around me. Prayer is no longer the last resort—it is what I do before everything else fails. The Lord opened my eyes about Satan, his hoard, and how they work in my life.

I often thank Him for His holy angels and all they do for us in service to Him. Though I am not preoccupied with the spiritual battle that continues to wage around me, I am keenly aware of it. Therefore, I am more sensitive to the Holy Spirit. When He nudges, I listen. When someone or something is on my heart, I pray. When I am downcast, I pray to understand the source and test the spirit. When temptation comes, I pray for an escape. When carnal emotions arise, I pray for a change of heart. Finally, I pray God will never let me forget that prayer is not just a privilege—it is my duty.

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