

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

Establishing a Prayer Team To Share God's Heart to Reach the Lost

In the Territory of a Roaring Lion

When you hear the term “spiritual warfare,” what do you picture? Fantastical realms of angels doing battle with demons? Strange imaginations from Hollywood, with priests holding up crucifixes while the head of an oppressed person spins in 360 degree circles? Or, closer to home, do you think of times you have faced temptation, and the idea of a “good little angel” on one shoulder, whispering for you to do the right thing, while a “devilish imp” sits on the other shoulder, shouting for you to do the fun thing?

Since coming to Ocean Springs, I have begun to think on and ponder the realities of spiritual warfare far more than I used to – Because we are seeing its reality all around us in unmistakable ways.

Sometimes that reality of warfare is so clear because it confronts us face to face:

- Like the time, not long after we moved to the coast, when we were looking for a place to house the ministry. As we walked into one place, a woman who was not supposed to be there came out the front door and began to shout at us, “Who are you? Why are you here?!” She kept going, now moving toward us, all the while shouting over and over, “Who are you? Why are you here?!” She was small, but she was loud – and she was advancing on us! I had no idea what to do, but I could just picture, if she didn’t stop, how the headlines would read the next day: “New pastor gets into fistfight with little old lady!” Closer and closer she came, all the while shouting the same phrase, again and again. And then it got weird.... From behind us, another lady, whom we also did not know, pulled up behind us in her car. She rolled down the window, and she began to shout. The. Exact. Same. Thing. “Who are you? Why are you here?!” In the face of such a bizarre situation, I would like to tell you that I rose up and spoke with boldness against what I believe was a demonic confrontation; that I said loudly, “In the name of Jesus, be gone!” The truth is.... I sort of froze. Until a local alderman we were with stepped between those ladies and us and told them to back down. After that, we all got in our cars and left, unsure of what had just happened, but convinced we had just encountered a direct attack from the enemy. In fact, the entire episode felt similar to Luke 8, where Jesus lands on a new shore, and a demon-possessed man comes out and confronts him, saying, “Who are you, and why have you come?!”
- Then there is the incident that happened after a night of “fishing” and ministry down in the Government Street music district where I spend so much time. It had been an amazing night. The Lord had clearly and directly led me into several good, strong, productive conversations with people in the bars. Hurting people I was able to listen to and show compassion to. And with whom I was also able to speak to about Jesus, to share the hope of the gospel into their hurts. It was a fantastic night. A night where I knew the Lord had clearly and powerfully shown up, where His hand and His Spirit, and His work to draw the lost to Himself was clear and unmistakable.



So much so that, as I drove home afterwards, I was singing praises to God out loud, right there in my car. It was awesome! I had to stop and get gas on the way home. And, as I was filling up, a man whom I had never seen before, didn't know, and haven't seen since, emerged from the shadows. He didn't approach me, as if to rob me or ask for money, as one might expect when alone at a gas station after midnight. Rather, he stood just far enough away, still mostly in the dark, just outside of the light at pumps. But he was looking dead at me – And he began to shout profanities. One after another. Every curse word you can imagine. All shouted, and all directed at me. He did this the entire time I was filling up with gas. Again, I would like to tell you that I had the courage to move toward him, invoking the name of Jesus as I advanced. But instead, I finished filling my car, got inside, and drove away, with him still staring straight at me and cursing nonstop, until I had left him behind. And again, as surprising and bizarre as that encounter was, as I look back on it now, I am convinced that the demonic was showing itself. That, on a night where God was breaking through and impacting people's lives, our enemy, who 1 Peter 5 tells us "prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour," was upset and angry at seeing people reached and brought toward salvation with the gospel and name of Jesus. And he was letting his feelings be known!

Those stories are wild. And true. But the worst spiritual warfare is quieter...and all around us



It has been observed by others that, whenever God starts to bring revival or spiritual awakening... Satan is the first one to "wake up." And I believe that we are witnessing that all around us here in Ocean Springs, in a town we are asking and working to see God claim for Himself through the gospel. Sometimes it is in bold, frontal, and strange ways like the two

incidents above. But the worst warfare is far more widespread, and all around us daily.

- It was there when I was scheduled to meet with a man, a former pastor who has denied the faith and left his belief in Jesus, but who wants to meet with me to ask questions when we get together. And we were supposed to meet just yesterday – expressly for discussing how Stephanie and I can minister to and help him and his wife. But, while I was driving to meet him, he called and said that his teenage son was melting down, so he couldn't meet with me.
- It is there when I have an amazing, God-ordained conversation with a bartender who has confessed to me that his lifestyle is killing him, but who then turns and follows the pied-piper invitation of his friends who say, "Come out drinking with us."
- It was there last week, when I met with a musician who has become dear to me. mA lost man for whom I am praying urgently for his salvation. He has so many questions. And as we sat and talked, he asked me outright, "What is it that you believe about Jesus?" And so, for close to an hour, we sat and talked, and he asked questions, and I got to clearly, plainly explain to him what

the gospel is – and how Jesus offers him new life and salvation! And then my heart broke as his eyes dimmed, and he said, “I just don’t think I need a Savior like you say I do.”

- And it is also there, even in our new core group, now meeting weekly on Sunday nights in my home. We worship. And we dive into Ephesians together, discovering what God says about who we are in Christ, and how that new gospel identity changes everything and gives us new life, new hope, and new power for this life, and even connects us to a new purpose and a new calling through this life. It’s awesome! And yet, among these brothers and sisters, there lies the same struggles with marriages, parenting, job concerns, and daily stresses that threaten to take our eyes off of Christ and distract us from the hope and the calling we have in Him through the gospel.
- And, last but not least, it is there in me. It is almost predictable: After the times of the greatest and most powerful ministry successes – A Bible study that God spoken powerfully through, a counseling session where the Holy Spirit does his work in a hurting person’s life, or a time of witnessing where God brings profound, providential, and clear advances for the gospel – Often, it is immediately after that, like Elijah after Carmel, that I will struggle with anxiety, depression, loneliness, or even disbelief. After God has shown up, I will find myself struggling with, “But will it really work down here?” I confess that to my great frustration. And to ask for your prayer.

Our God is on the move in Ocean Springs. That is clear and undeniable. As some of you have heard me say in person, we have never before seen Him move ahead of us, “fill the sails,” and bring clear victories for ministry in ways that can only be His Spirit at work, like He is doing here in Ocean Springs. We have already seen Him save people through conversion and belief in Jesus Christ. We are seeing Him bring hope to lost and missing people. And we are seeing Him build His church.

But it is also clear that our enemy is real. And he doesn’t like what is happening here. As God is on the move, our enemy is doing everything he can to resist the revival and evangelism God wants to bring to Ocean Springs. It is exactly what Jesus teaches in the Parable of the Sower (**Matt. 13**): God’s word is going out, it is being sown like seed, and it will bring a harvest more plentiful than anything we can imagine. But along the way, as some of the seeds fall to the ground, there is an enemy who seeks to snatch the it away before it takes root and leads to saved lives. He can’t ultimately stop it. And he is ultimately defeated. But he is not going down without a fight. And he can cause a lot of hurt along the way. As **2 Cor. 4** puts it, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”



So will you join with us in warfare – Through prayer

The word makes clear that the way to triumph in spiritual warfare is not through our might (which doesn’t exist), but through prayer. Will you join with us in a life-giving supply line of prayer:

- **For our core group.** The Lord is faithfully bringing new couples and singles to us. Pray that we will grow in the gospel, and in our calling to love each other bodaciously, through all the ups and downs of life, and in our ability to witness the love and gospel of Jesus to the lost who are all around us in Ocean Springs.



• **For our witness to deepen in the Government Street parish... And far beyond it!** Pray for the core group (and me) to have eyes to see and faith to respond as God brings connections and conversations with the lost wherever we go around town – That all of Ocean Springs will be claimed and won for the gospel and Kingdom of Jesus Christ!



- **And pray** that we will be those who, even in the face of constant attack from the enemy, “Have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, because they loved not their lives even unto death.” (Rev. 12)

God is doing it. Come be a part of it!

I mean it when I say that, in all of my ministry, I have never seen God move in power like He is starting to do here. It is just the beginning, but we believe it is going to be an amazing story. Our hope is that it will spread, and lead to a healthy church here, and to the planting of many more churches on the coast, and to the equipping and encouraging of many people and churches who are part of our team and part of God’s movement in Ocean Springs. Come and see. You are invited. And thank you, dear friends, for your prayer and support. May God bless you in His grace and love!

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A closing encouragement:

“Satan does have his wily ways, and he is out to get us. But we are also God’s invading army, and we are on the attack. We are bringing light into a dark world.”

– David Powlison

Hope Presbyterian is a GOSPEL COMMUNITY that exists to REACH OCEAN SPRINGS to REACH THE WORLD for JESUS CHRIST