

• HARVEST POCKET BOOKS •



WINNING
YOUR SPIRITUAL
BATTLES



TONY EVANS

THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE

In an art gallery in Europe hangs a painting titled *Checkmate*. On one side of a chessboard sits the devil, full of laughter. His hand is poised, ready to make his next move. On the other side of the chessboard sits a shaking, frightened young man. Sweat covers his forehead, dripping down and mixing with a solitary tear on his cheek. The game is obviously drawing to a close, and the winner appears to have already been decided.

One day, a chess champion from a far off country visited the gallery. Naturally, the painting caught his attention, inviting him to examine it for a very long time. In fact, while others had moved on throughout the gallery, the chess champion remained fixated on the game and especially on the devil, who sat eagerly waiting for his next turn, in which he planned to steal this man's soul.

Minutes turned into hours as the chess champion studied the board from every possible angle. The sweat on the young man's forehead urged him to continue

Finally, as the gallery was about to close, the chess champion found the proprietor of the gallery and asked him, "Sir, would you happen to have a chessboard here?"

After looking around in several of the offices, he located a chessboard and brought it to the man. The chess champion laid the board out at the base of the painting precisely as it was in the painting. He made a move and then countered that move in the only way that the devil could to avoid checkmate. He then made another move, and countered it again knowing that the devil would have to defend himself in his next move as well. The chess champion did this several more times, putting the devil on the defensive each and every time. Eventually, a loud yell was heard throughout the gallery as the chess Champion cried out in relief, "I did it! I did it! I did it!"

Turning to the painting, the chess champion lowered his voice and said, "Young man, your enemy miscalculated a very important move. I uncovered it, and as a result, you don't have to lose! You win!"

This chess champion had discovered a way not only for the young man to escape but also to checkmate the devil himself.

Friend, if you have picked up this book, the chances are that you may have felt like the man in the painting. Fear or anxiety has crept up on you as you imagine the devil preparing to make the final move in your personal life, marriage, home, health, career, finances, or any

number of other arenas. Satan's confident laughter and swift moves have tricked you into believing that he is running the show and calling the shots. He has been toying with your emotions as if you were a puppet on a string.

But as we journey through this study together, I encourage you to wipe the sweat from your forehead and dry the tears from your eyes. You can do this because you have a Champion who knows how to guide your every move. In fact, this Champion has already made the final move on the devil, securing your victory forever. If you will simply play out the remainder of the game according to His directions and underneath the overarching rule of His kingdom agenda, you will claim your victory. That is guaranteed.

The great thing is that you don't have to earn your victory, nor do you have to figure it out for yourself. God has already given you everything you need in order to make your next move on your path to triumph. As we begin, I want you to realize this key principle: You are not fighting *for* victory-you are fighting *from* victory. This battle has already been won!

The History of the Battle

To grasp the truth behind this principle, you first need to understand the history of the battle. It all began when God made the first move by creating the angels. Lucifer, the anointed angel, responded negatively to that

move by rebelling against God and taking one-third of the angels with him in that rebellion. God countered that move by creating man, in His own image, a little lower than the angels. Satan rebelled against that move by enticing Adam and Eve to sin, thus turning earth over to his control.

God then countered Satan's move by providing a redemptive covering for Adam and Eve so they could return back to fellowship with God. Satan made his next move by inciting Cain to kill Abel in order to cut off the godly line.

But God responded to Satan's move through the birth of Seth, making a way for men to begin calling on the name of the Lord again. Satan countered that move by luring Nimrod at the Tower of Babel into thinking he could make himself and his people as high as the heavens.

For God's next move, He turned His gaze onto a man named Abraham, calling out a nation through him to be holy and set apart. Satan, however, countered that move by trapping this nation in Egypt under Pharaoh's rule. But then God grabbed Moses in Midian and placed him in position to knock Pharaoh out of the equation altogether.

Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament the game went on like this-move, countermove, move, countermove. By the end of the Old Testament, we have reached a time of four hundred years where no move is

recorded by either side as both sit staring at the board in silence.

But when the New Testament opens up, we see God reach for a special piece-His own son, Jesus Christ – and move Him into a new location, from heaven to earth. Satan attempts to counter God’s move by tempting Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus overcomes his move through using the Word of God. So Satan then tries what he thinks is going to be his final move of checkmate by orchestrating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But Satan miscalculated something very important because he didn't realize that death on the cross was not a checkmate move. In fact, it was just a setup for the final move that God would make to checkmate Satan by raising Jesus from the dead.

The accomplishment of the cross, through the resurrection of Christ, was God's final move and offered each one of us victory over an enemy who is seeking to intimidate, deceive, and destroy us. The ultimate winner of this game has been decided. Victory has been secured. While you and I are on earth and still in play, we need to live in light of the truth of the victory gained through that final move-the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of that decisive move by God, Satan no longer has authority over you to defeat you. His only means to overcome you is to deceive you-to make you believe that the winner of the battle is yet undecided.

How the Spiritual Impacts the Physical

By illustrating spiritual warfare through a simple game of chess, I don't mean to minimize the severity of the battle nor the enormous depth of pain and number of casualties that have resulted from it. It *is* a battle. We are in a war. In fact, the war we are in is like no other war that any of us have ever known or heard about or could even conceive. If I were to ask you to think of the absolute worst war in human history, it would pale in comparison to the spiritual battle waging all around us.

This war is different from all other wars not only because of its sheer magnitude and scope but also because this war is fought in a place we have never seen. Spiritual warfare is *the cosmic conflict waged in the invisible, spiritual realm but simultaneously fleshed out in the visible, physical realm*. To put it another way, the *root* of the war is something you cannot see, but the *effects* of the war are clearly seen and felt. This is because everything physical is either influenced or caused by something spiritual.

Behind every physical disturbance, setback, ailment, or issue we face lies a spiritual root. Unless we first identify and deal with the root spiritual cause, our attempts to fix the physical problem will provide only temporary relief at best. In other words, everything that your five senses experience physically is first generated by something that your five senses cannot detect.

In light of this truth, you and I need to engage a sixth

sense—a spiritual sense—when doing battle in this war. We must employ that which goes beyond physiology and address the spiritual root before we can truly fix the physical fruit. Here is the key to experiencing and living out on earth the victory that God has already secured in heaven: to learn how to intentionally and effectively do battle in the spiritual realm.

Satan often tries to prevent you from taking the spiritual realm seriously. If he can divert your attention away from the spiritual realm, he can keep you away from the only place where your victory is found. If he can distract you with people or things you can see, taste, touch, hear, or smell, he can keep you from living a life of victory.

The Location of the Battle

This battle is so important and its spoils so costly, it is essential that we start at the beginning and lay a solid foundation for our strategy. The first thing you need to know is where this battle takes place. Paul gives us the answer in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, which is the passage we will be using as the basis for our study throughout this book.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness *in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our battle is not against our neighbor, spouse, coworker, child, or even our own propensities or weaknesses in our flesh. People are simply conduits of the spiritual battle taking place in another realm. Our battle, according to the Word of God, is against the rulers, powers, and world forces of wickedness located in heavenly places. "Heavenly places" simply means in the spiritual realm.

Here's a second principle I want you to take hold of. Whatever has gone on, is going on, or will go on in your visible, physical world is rooted in the invisible, spiritual realm. If you do not know how to navigate in the spiritual realm, you cannot hope to truly overcome in the physical realm.

This highlights a problem we often run into. We usually try to fix things in the physical realm by using methods of this world even though this world is not where our problems originate. We are like a police officer in his living room shooting his TV because he sees a criminal on a reality show pulling a gun. If the officer shoots at the

television, he will have merely added to the mess that's going on. He might feel better for a moment because he did something but in the end, nothing has been solved. In fact, things have only gotten worse.

Our battles originate in the spiritual realm-the heavenly places-so the only way to fight them is with weapons that work in that realm.

Heavenly Places

Paul uses the phrase "heavenly places" a number of times in the book of Ephesians, letting us know both the scope and occupants of the location. His first reference to this realm comes in chapter 1, verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ."

We learn from this verse that everything God is ever going to do for us, He has already done. Every spiritual blessing is already located in this unseen realm. Every promise God has ever made and plans to fulfill on your behalf, every gift you will ever receive, and every hope that will ever be satisfied has already been deposited in your account in the spiritual realm. God has "blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ." Your blessings and victory are already located there with your name written on them, waiting for you to grab them, use them, and walk in them.

Many believers live defeated lives simply because they are unaware of this truth. Yet Paul makes it clear in this passage that we have already been blessed with *every* spiritual blessing in the spiritual realm.

In spiritual warfare, Satan tries to deceive you into believing that God is holding out on you and that it is up to you to get God to give you both blessings and victory. Satan wants you to think that if you pray more, give more, serve more, sin less, do better, or worship more, maybe God will give you more. This shifts the focus off of God and what He has already done in the spiritual realm and puts the focus on you and what you need to do in the physical realm. Doing those things in the physical realm is good and beneficial for spiritual growth and cultivating intimacy with God and others, but those things are not the keys to accessing what God already has for you in the spiritual realm.

The way to access the power of your blessings is through a biblical understanding and application of grace through faith. In grace, God has made every believer complete in Jesus Christ. Religious "works" that we do in an effort to get something from God actually nullify grace (Galatians 5:1-4) because grace and works can never be mixed (Romans 11:6). Grace is the point of access to God. The way we enter this point of access is through faith. Faith is acting as if God is telling the truth. It is acting as if something is true even when it doesn't *appear* to

be true in order that it might *be shown to be* true simply because God *said* it's true. The job of faith is to discover what the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places already are, ask God for them, and make life choices in light of that reality. We will look more deeply at grace and faith a little later.

The Occupants

So far we have seen that you are not fighting for victory—you are fighting from a position of victory. We have also seen that whatever has gone on, is going on, or will go on in your physical world is rooted in the spiritual realm. And every spiritual blessing is located in this spiritual realm. Paul tells us more about the spiritual realm when he writes, "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and *seated Him* at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Paul has already told us that our blessings are waiting for us to access them in heavenly places, and he now tells us that the One who is in charge, Jesus Christ, is seated in these same heavenly places. That means that if you want to get to the One who is in charge—Jesus—you will need to approach Him where He is—in the spiritual realm, the heavenly places. In the next chapter of Ephesians, Paul gives us more details about this.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace we have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and *seated us with Him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6)

We've seen that our blessings are located in heavenly places and that Jesus Christ is seated in heavenly places. Now we learn that *we ourselves* are seated with Jesus in these same heavenly places. Right this very minute, you and I are spiritually seated with Christ in the spiritual realm.

This is an important truth to remember. If you are focusing only on where you are sitting right now physically, you are not viewing your location as being in the same place as where the solutions to your programs actually exist. Where you are physically is not the only place you are located. You are equally located in another realm. Paul tells us that at the moment you trusted in Christ for your salvation, you were transported to another realm. Even though your physical body is here on earth, your spirit – the part of you that has been designed with the capacity to control your physical body – is operating in another location.

Paul tells us more about this other location in the next chapter of Ephesians.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made know through the church *to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 3:8-10).

Not only are your spiritual blessings, Jesus Christ, and you yourself located in the spiritual realm at this point in time, the angels (rulers and authorities) are also operating in the spiritual realm. Why is this important to know? Because it is better to have an angel battling a demon than to battle a demon yourself in your flesh. If you are facing a demonic problem, you need an angelic solution.

The Bible calls God “the Lord of hosts.” That name refers to His military charge over an angelic corps whose job is to go up against any demonic actions that are attacking you. You may be physically strong you may lift weights, and you might be powerful in your body, but trust me – you are no competition for a demon. In order to call on angelic help, you need to have a heavenly mindset because angels do battle in heavenly places.

What is critical to note in our look at angels is that

every Christian has at least one angel who has been assigned to operate on his or her behalf in the spiritual realm. We read in Hebrews 1:14 (NIV), “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” You have someone who knows and understands the spiritual realm better than you and whose job is to function in the realm in a way that benefits you. That is a potent truth.

Yet while every Christian has an angel whose task is to minister to him or hear from heavenly places, every Christian also has demonic opposition whose goal is to make all hell break loose in his or her life. We saw in our previous look at Ephesians 6:12 that “the spiritual forces of wickedness” (demons) are also located “in the heavenly places.”

So Paul tells the church of Ephesus that our blessings are in the heavenly places, Jesus is in the heavenly places, we are in the heavenly places, angels are in the heavenly places, and the demonic realm is in the heavenly places. With so much going on in the heavenly places, it only makes sense that we should learn and apply as much as we can on how to function and operate effectively in heavenly places. After all, we are in a war where ground zero is located in the heavenly places.

The physical world simply manifests what is already happening in the spiritual realm. If you are unaware of the reality of the spiritual realm, you will be unaware of how that realm operates, causing you to be unprepared

and ill equipped to live out your victory in your physical life.

I recently had the chance to see the blockbuster film *Inception*, which illustrated a similar truth cinematically. In the film, the main characters had discovered a way to enter into another realm – the realm of dreams. The dreams appeared to be as vivid and as authentic as the real world they were currently sleeping in, but the dream realm was not real.

Because the dream appeared to be real to all of their five senses, each character had to choose an item that would let them know whether they were in a dream or in reality. Without the item, the person in the dream might begin to believe that the dream was reality, and he or she might stay there – operating by the laws of reality within the realm of a dream.

The main character's item was a spinning top. If his top kept spinning endlessly, that meant he was in a dream. The knowledge that he was in a dream then affected the way he functioned within the dream. Essentially, he could take more risks and live differently in the dream because he knew that at any time, he could simply wake back up in reality.

I'm not suggesting that the physical world we live in is a dream or that physical realities do not carry with them both physical and spiritual consequences. But I want us to realize that our ultimate reality is taking place in the

heavenly places – in the spiritual realm. Conversations, decisions, battles, and the like that occur in the spiritual realm unilaterally impact what takes place in our physical lives. Unless we realize that truth, we will continue to look for physical solutions to solve spiritual problems manifesting themselves in our physical lives.

Thankfully, God has given us an item to use – a guide – that we are to look at in order to remind us of our true spiritual location, and that is His Word. When we read God's Word, we are reminded that all spiritual warfare, as well as our solutions for that warfare, are located in the spiritual realm. This world is not our home. As believers we are citizens of and seated in the heavenly realm.

Physical solutions cannot fix physical problems that originate in the spiritual realm. So rather than spending all of our time, money, effort, strength, mental energy, conversations, and anything else we can come up with to help us fare better in the physical world, we ought to first be learning and applying spiritual warfare practices and techniques, so we can defeat our enemy and access our blessings in the spiritual realm.

The demonic realm doesn't want you to know that. The demonic realm wants you to continue to live and do battle in the world of our five senses so that you will try to fix your situation with the limited weapons associated with your five senses. What ends up happening, though, is that a lot of time, money, and energy gets wasted trying

to do away with bad fruit while not addressing the spiritual root. But remember this principle: *If all you see is what you see, you will never see all that there is to be seen.*

Since the invisible realm affects the visible realm, if you want to fix something in the physical realm, you must first address the invisible and spiritual root behind it. A failure to address the invisible, spiritual cause simply leads to a failure to experience a long-term and complete visible, physical cure.

Studying Satan's Game

Paul tells us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and rulers in the spiritual realm. These powers seek to rob you of all that God has stored up for you in the heavenly places. But Paul encourages each of us to wrestle in a unique way -by standing firm against the enemy's schemes and strategies.

One way to stand firm is to learn what those strategies are. Beings in the demonic realm don't want you to know their methodology. They don't want you to figure out their approach. They want you to continue to picture them with horns and a pitchfork and wearing a red jumpsuit. If you continue to think of demonic beings in that way, you will not take them seriously. Nor will you battle them effectively.

Everyone who knows me knows I love football. When I was young, I played football every week. A leg

injury sidelined me early on from pursuing the sport, but my passion for the game has never diminished.

Football is the consummate male sport. Well-trained athletes battle it out with precision moves and power-packed plays filling every second of 60 minutes with elevated levels of testosterone similar to those of the gladiators in previous centuries.

One of the highlights of my ministry has been getting to serve on the frontlines of these battles as a chaplain not only in football but also in basketball. I've been the chaplain for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks for more than 30 years. I also served as chaplain for the NFL's Dallas Cowboys during the height of Coach Tom Landry's era, and I currently teach at the Dallas Cowboys' Bible study as well as provide personal counseling for any of the players who need it.

Football is a great life coach. It teaches us the value of self-discipline, determination, and hard work. It also teaches us how to not only outplay our opponents but also outsmart them.

Before an upcoming game, players watch what is called game film. Watching game film includes viewing clips from the upcoming opponent's previous games. The purpose of watching the film is to identify the opponent's weaknesses. Once those weaknesses are identified, a plan is put together on how to best go about exploiting those weaknesses.

If you are a football player, watching film is a good thing to do prior to a game because it gives you an edge you would not normally have over your opponent. The only problem is that your opponent also has film of your games and is studying it to exploit your weaknesses.

In the spiritual war, our opponent, the devil – along with his team of demons – has had thousands of years watching humanity’s film. He’s an expert on exploiting personality weaknesses, traumas, racial and gender divisions, out flesh and its desires, and many other areas of our human nature. And the demonic realm has been watching your own game film and mine since our conception.

Satan and his demons know what happened to you when you were a child that messed up your thinking, lowered our self-esteem, or led to sin patterns that now seem unbreakable in your life. They know about the issues and abuse (either to you or from you) that operate within your physical world. They know what frustrates you or wears you down, thus giving them an opportunity to move in on you. And they have one purpose for watching your film and gathering this knowledge: to exploit your weaknesses to their advantage in order to defeat you.

This may sound bleak, but the good news is that we also have access to game film. Not only that, but we have a Coach who knows our opponent’s weaknesses, and He has told us what those weaknesses are in His Word. He has given us a step-by-step summary of the game

Film – the Bible. In it, we discover everything we need to know in order to experience victory in this spiritual battle.

Any NFL team that takes to the field on any given Sunday that has not done its homework by first studying its opponent is setting itself up for defeat. In fact, any player who would run out into the game unprepared like that would not find himself being a player for much longer.

The same is true in the Christian life. God has given each of us everything we need to defeat our enemy, but it is up to us to watch the film and to play according to His rules and strategies. Our enemy is a crafty opponent, and unless we do battle against him correctly, he will outwit us. After all, he has our game film. He knows just what button to push to get you to go somewhere you never thought you would go – both in your emotions and your actions. Satan has your game film. It's time for you to study his.

The story is told about a farmer who was perpetually having his melons stolen by thieves. He had to come up with something to do about this theft, or he was going to end up losing a large amount of his profits. So the farmer came up with a brilliant idea. He decided to post a sign on his farm that read, "One of these melons is poisonous."

The next day, the farmer went out to view his melons, and he discovered what he thought would be the case all along – none of his melons had been stolen. Satisfied that

He had outsmarted the thieves, the farmer went about the rest of his day smugly filled with gratification. However, the following day, when the farmer went back to work in his field, he saw that the word “One” has been scratched out on his sign. Scribble next to it was the word “Two.” The sign now read, “Two of these melons are poisonous.” The farmer lost his entire crop because he didn’t know which other melon had been poisoned.

That story is a lot like dealing with the devil. No matter what you or I come up with, Satan is going to try to come up with something better. No matter what New Year’s resolution or positive-thinking ten-stop plan you or I make, Satan is going to try to knock us off course by the time we take step number one. The only way to live in the victory that has been secured for us in spiritual warfare is to study Satan’s game film, learn his strategies and weaknesses, and stand firm in God’s strength and according to God’s prescribed plays in the heavenly realm.

We cannot outwit or outsmart the father of lies and master of deception. To try to do so on our own would be foolish. If winning this spiritual chess game were left up to us, we would be sweating and crying like the young man in the painting I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In fact, many of us take it upon ourselves to battle the war in our own strength and with our own wisdom, so we *are* sweating and crying more than we ought.

However, we have a Champion who has already

studied every move on the game board. He knows what we need to do to finish this game well. It's time to put God's strategies for victory in spiritual warfare into practice and make the devil and his demons the ones who swear and cry instead.

What do you say? Are you ready to review some game film? Let's take a look and advance in victory.