

VICTORY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

FIELD GUIDE FOR BATTLE

TONY EVANS



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TONY EVANS

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Dr. Tony Evans is one of the country's most respected leaders in evangelical circles. He is a pastor, best-selling author and frequent speaker at Bible conferences and seminars throughout the nation.

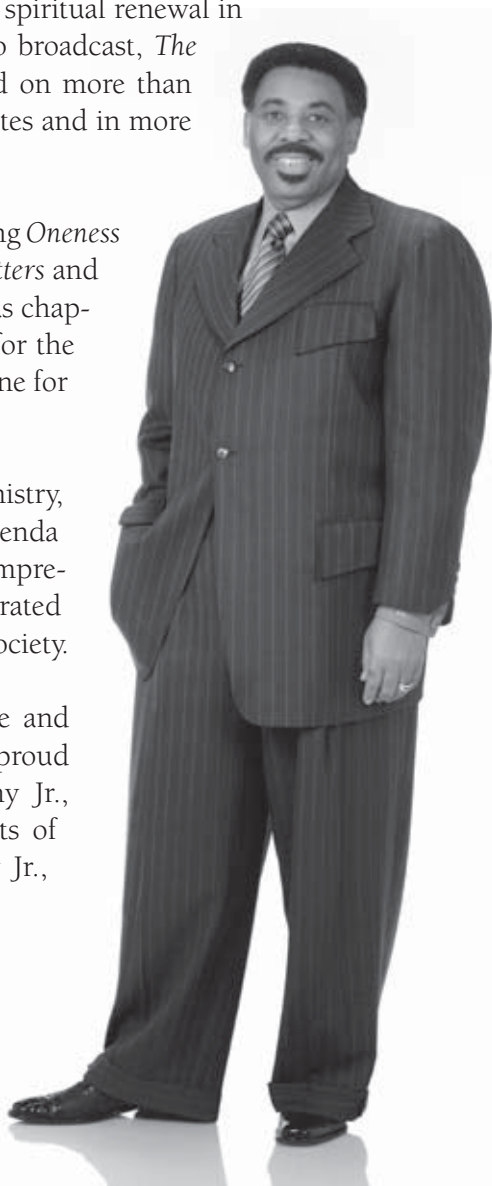
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SESSION ONE

In the blockbuster film *Inception* the main characters discovered a way to enter another realm—the realm of dreams. Though the dream seemed as vivid and authentic as the real world, the dream realm was not their reality.

Because the dream felt real to their five senses, each character created an item used to let others know if they were in a dream or in reality. Without the item, the person in the dream might believe the dream was reality, and they might stay there—operating by the laws of reality within the realm of the dream.

The main character's item was a spinning top. If his top kept spinning endlessly, that meant he was in a dream. If it fell, he had woken up. The knowledge that he was in a dream enabled him to take more risks and live differently because he knew at any time, he could simply wake up in reality.

Is it possible that right now our ultimate reality isn't happening in the physical world as we see it? Could it be that right now there is a spiritual battle waging all around us in the unseen realms and that battle has physical effects in this world? If that's true, then most of us walk around in this world with no idea of what's happening in the spiritual one. The top keeps on spinning.

The spiritual world is real. Conversations, decisions, and battles that occur in the spiritual realm unilaterally impact what takes place in our physical lives. Unless we realize that truth and wake up to the battle, we will continue to look for physical solutions to solve spiritual problems manifesting themselves in our physical lives.

Time to wake up and get in the real fight.

DAY 1

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

We are engaged in war. In fact, this war is like no other war that we have ever known, heard about, or could even conceive. Its implications reach further and its casualties devastate more than any conflict in the history of humankind. Strangely, though, most people walk around completely unaware that it's taking place.

What about you? On the scale below, mark your awareness of spiritual warfare.

Unaware

Very aware

What makes spiritual warfare different from other conflicts in the world?

What are the dangers of being unaware of this ongoing battle?

Above and beyond its sheer magnitude and scope, a major difference between this war and other wars is that this war is fought in a place we have never seen. *Spiritual warfare* can be defined as *the cosmic conflict waged in the invisible, spiritual realm that is simultaneously fleshed out in the context of the visible, physical realm*. To put it another way, you can't see the root of the war, but you can certainly see—and feel—the effects.

In fact, there is a spiritual root behind every physical disturbance, setback, ailment, or issue we face.

Look at the previous definition of *spiritual warfare*. Have you ever felt directly engaged in the invisible realm?

How about the physical? What is one instance when you think you've clearly felt or seen the physical effects of the battle?

Too often we restrict our battles to physical. We battle the physical temptation to sin, the physical injustice prevalent in impoverished nations, and the physical evil of persecuting governments, to name a few. But if we restrict our focus to the physical realm, victory will be only temporary and shallow. It's a little like putting a bandage on a wound when there is internal hemorrhaging.

If we really want to get in the fight, we must equip ourselves with the armor of God, which allows us to fight not just the effects of the war but the root of the conflict. To do that, we must understand who, what, and where we are fighting.

Read Ephesians 6:10-12. According to Paul, whom is our battle *not* against?

Who are our opponents?

Where does the battle take place?

Our battle is not against our neighbor, spouse, coworker, child, or even our own propensities and weaknesses in our flesh. People are simply a conduit for the spiritual battle taking place in another realm—the heavens. The “heavens” (v. 12) simply means *in the spiritual realm*.

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That's a hard truth to grasp because it's easier to do battle with the physical. We feel wronged in some way, and we want someone or something physical at which to lash out. But doing that is like a police officer watching TV in his living room and pulling a gun on a criminal he sees on a reality TV show. If the officer shoots at the television, he will merely add more mess to the mess that is already going on. It might make him feel better for a moment that he did something, but in the end nothing has been solved. In fact, things have only gotten worse.

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 can't hope to truly fix anything in this one.

Let that last paragraph sink in. Does that mean there is no place for action in the physical world? Why or why not?

Describe the kind of perspective you would need to do battle in the spiritual realm in order to effect physical change.

When you're active in the spiritual battle, it doesn't mean you won't have tough conversations with coworkers and family. Nor does it mean you spend all your time hiding in your closet praying. Far from it. When actively engaged in the spiritual realm, you can move with confidence and power in the physical one because you're prepared and ready.

You're no longer content to settle for easy fixes and minor wins. You've tapped into the secret to abundant life and spiritual victory. You're living—and fighting—at a deeper level than most people.

But you've also come to realize that the opponents you face are more dangerous, treacherous, and numerous than you ever thought possible.

Pray today that God will begin to sharpen your spiritual sense so that you can begin to see the true nature of the battles before you.

DAY 2

THE ENEMY

Most of us, if we even believe Satan exists, think we'd easily recognize him. He's the guy with the red suit and horns, right? Not quite. That's too obvious. His scheme is to trick you. He doesn't want you to see him for who he truly is. He's not merely hanging out at the First Church of Hell. Rather, he's concerned with finding a way to infiltrate First Baptist, First Methodist, or First Bible Church of Anytown, USA.

In fact, Satan is very content that most people don't believe he exists. Why? Because if you don't take the spiritual realm seriously, there's no chance you can ever find spiritual victory in this life. Maybe the greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he doesn't exist.

What three words come to mind when you think of Satan?

1.

2.

3.

Why is it important to be informed about Satan?

Read Isaiah 14:12-15. According to this passage, what was Lucifer's great sin?

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According to the Bible, the spiritual battle began when God created the angels. Lucifer, the anointed angel, became proud of his great beauty and rebelled against God, taking 1/3 of the angels with him. From that moment on, the battle in the heavens has raged on.

The first time we see Satan in Scripture, he's slithering around in the form of a snake in the garden of Eden.

Read Genesis 3:1. How does the Bible describe Satan in this passage?

Why is the serpent a fitting form for him to take in light of this description?

The reason Satan took on the form of a snake is because he, along with his demons, operates best when there is a physical presence through which to work. Though spiritual warfare is being waged in heavenly places, our Enemy is very skilled at locating available vehicles in the physical realm through which to influence, manipulate, and deceive.

This particular physical form fits the character of the Enemy. A snake creeps and slithers. He slips into dark, unexpected places. A snake strikes without warning. That's the way the Enemy works—not overt but covert. Not obvious but subtle.

Paul shows us a clip of Satan's major game plan in Ephesians 6:10-11: "Be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil." The word *tactics* simply means *deceptive strategies*. Satan's overarching strategy, which he carries out in many ways, is to

deceive. He is the ultimate magician operating not only with smoke and mirrors but also by sleight of hand.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14. How does this verse relate to Ephesians 6:10-11?

Do you think you take the deceptive strategies of Satan seriously enough? Why or why not?

If Satan is the master of deception, how do you think you can more effectively recognize his tricks?

Genesis 3 is a case study in this kind of trickery. If Satan had been interested in a frontal, direct assault, he might have sought to do physical harm to the humans in the garden. Or he could have argued with them that God was evil or didn't exist at all. But he went with a far more devious—and ultimately more effective—form of attack.

Read Genesis 3:1-6. Describe Satan's tactic in these verses.

Why do you think this methodology was more successful than a frontal, direct assault?

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One of the Devil's main tricks is to cause you to miss the goodness of God. As he did with Eve in the garden, Satan wants you to question the value of all the trees that God provided by getting you to focus on the one tree God said to avoid. It's just a small seed of doubt and discontent, but that seed grows and grows in our hearts.

I wonder when Eve recognized that the snake was really the Devil in disguise. When she talked herself into tasting the fruit? As she took the bite? When Adam did? Probably not. She probably wasn't aware that an attack was under way until the attack was already over and the battle won.

Can you think of a specific instance when you realized too late that you were under spiritual attack?

What might you have done to be more on guard against the attack in the first place?

Satan is on the attack. Just because we don't see him doesn't mean he's not there, plotting against us all.

Pray today that you will begin to be wary of spiritual attacks from places you would least expect.

DAY 3

THE ATTACK

Like any battle, spiritual warfare is filled with strategy from two sides—good and evil. Part of any good battle plan involves discovering the strategy of the other side. Once we know the strategy of the Enemy, we will be ready to counter his moves effectively. Satan’s battle plan involves the overall tactic of deception and has four stages of warfare. The first stage begins with desire.

Does the word *desire* have a positive or negative connotation? Why?

Desire isn’t bad. Legitimate desire motivates us and provides an avenue for obtaining satisfaction and delight. But Satan takes a legitimate desire and corrupts it so that we satisfy that desire through illegitimate means.

Can you think of a legitimate desire that is often fulfilled through illegitimate means?

A desire for food is good; gluttony is a sin. A desire for sex is good; immorality is a sin. A desire for sleep is good; laziness is a sin. Satan’s initial strategy is to take a legitimate, God-given desire in our lives and twist it into something illegitimate. He knows the desire can't be avoided or ignored—God has planted it within us. So Satan tries to warp that desire by influencing how it is directed and used.

Specifically, which of your legitimate desires does Satan most often corrupt? Why do you think he chooses that particular desire?

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The second stage in Satan's strategy is the direct use of deception. Like a fisherman trying to catch a fish, Satan doesn't put his hook in the water all by itself. Instead, he puts a worm on the hook to deceive the fish—or person, into thinking they are getting something tasty.

Satan doesn't advertise the local club by saying, "Come here and get drunk, become addicted to drugs or alcohol, lose your family, and throw away your future." He starts with something small—just a single screenshot from the Internet, a conversation you shouldn't have had, or a relationship you shouldn't have made. But that's only the entry point. He tricks you into thinking you're getting something with no consequences.

Read Numbers 1:1-2 and 1 Chronicles 21:1. David decided to take a census of the nation of Israel. Was taking a census, in and of itself, a sinful act?

How do you see Satan using deception with David?

David succumbed to the temptation of pride. He was deceived into thinking a census was no big deal. However, David took a census because he was convinced his army was so large that he didn't need God, and as a result, 70 thousand people died. The point is that whatever controls our minds controls our actions.

The third stage in Satan's strategy is disobedience. Desire leads to deception, which then leads to disobedience.

Read James 1:15. According to this passage, what does desire give birth to?

Desire is not sin. Sin is the illegitimate application and placement of desire. For example, when a young child makes a decision, it is often based on feelings and

desires. The child first *feels* like playing, watching TV, or eating, and then carries out the action of playing, watching, or eating. But part of maturing is learning to manage those desires appropriately. The same thing must happen spiritually. Victorious Christian living occurs when the Holy Spirit's presence is free to manage our feelings, emotions, and desires.

In the progression in James, however, the Holy Spirit's presence is not free to manage. There is only desire that deeply roots itself and then is fulfilled in whatever way is most readily available.

In James 1:15 what does the progression eventually lead to?

In what ways have you seen “death” show up due to that progression in your own life?

That's the fourth stage. Sin produces death in a variety of ways, all bringing about the diminished ability to experience God's promise of the abundant life. This death can show up as the death of a dream, relationship, career, virtue, or any other number of areas. Primarily, though, sin produces a death within the fullness of our spirits as our fellowship is broken with God.

Satan is so effective at implementing this strategy from start to finish that he tries to work himself out of a job by training the deceived to become deceivers themselves. He turns people into “deception evangelists,” spreading his lies quickly and effectively among us.

That's the strategy of the Enemy in this very real war. There are casualties all around us. But despite the strength and cunning of the Enemy, there is good news for us. Even though Satan's agenda and strategy are all-encompassing, they have already been defeated. But we must believe in the victory.

Pray that God will show you the areas of your life in which death is reigning. Express your trust in His ability to bring new life from death.

DAY 4

THE VICTORY

Satan may be the master of deception, but God is the master of reversal. Time after time throughout the history of the spiritual battle, Satan has put his best weapons and tactics forward. But time after time God has countered and brought good out of evil. The event that most clearly illustrates this reversal is the cross of Christ.

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus. How do you think Satan felt that day?

How should God's ability to dramatically reverse this apparent victory for Satan change the way you approach your own life circumstances?

The Son of God was brutally executed. Evil had won—or so it seemed. Three long days of silence from the heavens seemed to confirm that victory. But Satan miscalculated something very important. The cross was really the setup for God's ultimate victory over Satan by raising Jesus from the dead.

The accomplishment of the cross, through the resurrection of Christ, determined the ultimate outcome of the spiritual war. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, victory was secured. In light of His resurrection, each one of us can have victory over an Enemy who is seeking to intimidate, deceive, and destroy us.

What you and I need to do, while we are still on earth and the battles rage on, is to live in light of the ultimate victory. Because of the resurrection, Satan has no more authority over you. His only means to overcome and defeat you is through deception—making you believe the winner of the war is not yet decided.

What specifically would be different about the way you thought about spiritual warfare if you believed the victory was already decided?

Paul uses the word *heavens* a number of times in the Book of Ephesians, letting us know both the scope and occupants of the location of the spiritual battle. His first reference to this realm comes in chapter 1, when he writes, “Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Eph. 1:3).

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 in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” Your blessings and victory are already there with your name written on them, waiting for you to grab them, use them, and walk in them.

What obstacles in your life keep you from fully believing Ephesians 1:3?

Do you think most Christians know and believe this verse? Why or why not?

Many believers live defeated lives because they are unaware of this truth. In spiritual warfare, Satan tries to deceive you into believing that God is holding out on you and it's up to you to get God to give you both blessings and victory. Satan wants you to think if you pray more, give more, serve more, or sin less, maybe God will give you more. This thinking shifts the focus from God and what He has already done in the spiritual realm and puts that focus on you and what you need

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to do in the physical realm. While doing those things in the physical realm is good, it is not the key to access what God has already given you in the spiritual realm.

Read Ephesians 6:10. According to this verse, what are we supposed to do?

From where does that strength come?

In grace God has made every believer complete in Jesus Christ. Grace—not works—is the point of access to God. The way we enter this point of access is through faith. Faith is believing that God is telling the truth. The job of faith is to discover what the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places already are and to make life choices in that reality.

In the end it means we are called to firmly stand, not in our own strength but accessing the strength of God on our behalf. We do that not by trying harder but by believing harder in what He's already done in Christ.

When we do that, we find we are no longer fighting for victory but fighting from victory.

Reflect on that last statement. What difference would fighting from a stance of victory make in a spiritual battle?

For the rest of our study together, we'll discover those spiritual blessings God has already given to us. And we'll find out that believing in those blessings will not only help us stand but also help us armor up.

Pray today that you will have a growing understanding of the victory God has already won in Christ.

DAY 5

THE ARMOR

We are fighting the spiritual battle, not for victory but from victory. God has already won the war in Christ. He's given us everything we need in Christ to see His victory lived out in every battle we enter. But that begs the question: If the war is already won and we have all we need for the individual battles, why don't more Christians experience spiritual victory?

On the scale below, rate the usual outcome of your spiritual battles:

Frustration

Victory

Why did you answer the way you did?

The Enemy is victorious in our lives because we yield the power to him by not standing firm in our identity in Jesus Christ. We fail to firmly remain in the union we were designed to have with Christ, under His headship.

Read Colossians 1:9-17. Summarize this passage in your own words with a few sentences.

Why do you think Paul chose to emphasize these truths about Jesus?

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Jesus Christ holds all things together. Therefore, if you find yourself falling apart, it is a result of you not standing firm with Jesus in union with Him. Our union with Christ is essential to our victory over Satan's rule in our lives. We are *in Him* and *with Him*.

When Christ died, we died with Him. When Christ arose, we arose with Him. When Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, we were seated with Him (See Eph. 2:6). In other words, we were made to function in union with Christ. He has already beaten Satan. And you are in union with Him.

Read Ephesians 6:10-13. According to this passage, why have we been given the full armor of God?

How is the armor of God related to standing firm in Christ?

God has given you everything you need to see His victory manifested in your life. The means by which we see that victory is through the armor of God. And just as you wouldn't get partially dressed when you wake up in the morning before heading out the door, God doesn't want you to be partially spiritually dressed either.

Read Ephesians 6:14-17. Which piece of the armor would you think it would be easiest for you to put on?

Which do you think would be the most difficult? Why?

Notice the difference between the pieces of armor in verses 14-15 and the pieces in 16-17. How do Paul's commands in what to do with the armor differ in these two sections?

THE WAR REVEALED

In these verses Paul gives clear instructions about a specific wardrobe that is necessary for us not only to wear but also to have at our disposal when we engage in spiritual warfare.

You might think of it like a travel guide that is provided when you are going somewhere you've never been before. For example, when a person signs up to go on a safari in a remote region of the world, that person can go online and find a travel guide that will give him the details about the recommended articles of clothing and items to bring with them. In the same way, Paul has given us our travel guide so that we will know what to suit up in and take with us into the battle.

Each of the six pieces of armor is divided into one of two categories. The first category includes the first three pieces of armor and begins with the word *with*. This means you should wear the first three pieces at all times. You should never take them off. They are like a uniform a baseball player puts on to play ball.

Look back at Ephesians 6:14-15. Why do you think these pieces are described as pieces you should never take off?

The last three pieces of the armor are given to you to pick up as the situation demands. We are told to “take” them up. This is like that same baseball player grabbing his glove or his bat at a particular moment in the game.

Look back at Ephesians 6:16-17. Why do you think these pieces are described as pieces to take up?

Regardless of the armor, though, notice this: God is not going to dress us. He provides what we need, but the responsibility for putting it on is left to us.

It's time to suit up. Game on.

Pray today for the spiritual insight to put on God's armor as you discover more about it.

EVERY STRUGGLE AND CONFLICT FACED IN
THE PHYSICAL REALM
HAS ITS ROOT IN
THE SPIRITUAL REALM

With passion and clarity pastor and Bible teacher Dr. Tony Evans demystifies spiritual warfare so that readers can tackle challenges and obstacles with spiritual power. In this eight-session study Dr. Evans explains the spiritual origins of daily struggles and the tools of spiritual armor God has given the believer to live in the victory that has already been won through Jesus Christ.

Examine each piece of the armor along with Dr. Evans and experience the life, hope, and purpose God has for you.



DR. TONY EVANS is the founder and president of *The Urban Alternative*, a national ministry dedicated to restoring hope in personal lives, families, churches, and communities. Dr. Evans also serves as senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. He is the best-selling author of numerous books and his radio program, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*, is heard on more than 500 radio stations every day. For more information visit www.tonyevans.org.

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