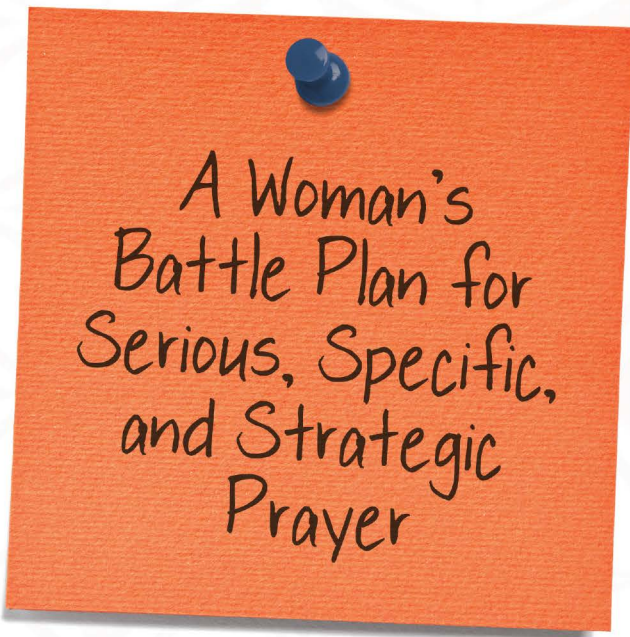


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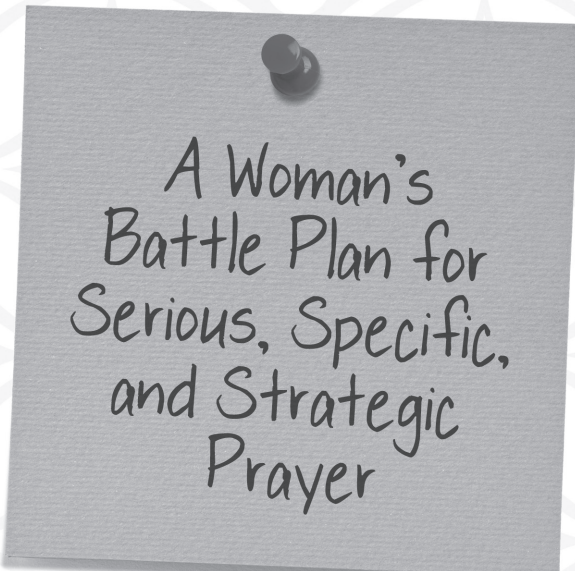
A Woman's
Battle Plan for
Serious, Specific,
and Strategic
Prayer

PRISCILLA SHIRER



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For

Annie Eleen Cannings

Because you've taught me the power
of writing down my prayers

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Theoden: *I will not risk open war.*

Aragorn: *Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not.*

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS

THIS MEANS WAR

Just so you know what you're getting into . . .

By the time you've finished reading (and working) through this book, the front cover shouldn't be able to close neatly back over on itself. It should be noticeably disfigured. Ski-ramping up from the spine at such a scooped angle that even if you laid an old-school telephone book on top, you still couldn't smooth out what's become so harshly, permanently misshapen. From heartfelt use. War torn. An impossible option for regifting at Christmastime.

I'm expecting grass stains. Ink smears. Dog-ears. Battle scars. A few of those little wrinkly circles that form on the page when an accidental drop of tea, if not a tear escaping from your eye, spills across two or three lines of text. Unmistakable signs that you've been here and been involved here, invested here.

I want pages ripped out and written on. The edges tattered and the corners curled. I want your kids afraid to

touch it without using plastic gloves. Perhaps even the salad tongs.

This book is just not meant for pretty reading. It's not for coffee-table curiosity and other such cameo appearances. Think of it instead as industrial-grade survival gear. Duct tape and superglue. Leather straps lashed around it. Old shoelaces maybe. In tight double knots. Whatever it takes to keep it all together.

Because this is war. The fight of your life. A very real enemy has been strategizing and scheming against you, assaulting you, coming after your emotions, your mind, your man, your child, your future. In fact, he's doing it right this second. Right where you're sitting. Right where you are.

But I say his reign of terror stops *here*. Stops *now*. He might keep coming, but he won't have victory anymore.

Because it all starts failing when we start praying.

Now if you want a book *about* prayer, this one's probably not for you. You can find some wonderful books on prayer by some scholarly writers, books that are well worth the time spent reading them. In fact, I highly suggest you do. Can't really learn too much about prayer, can you? But here, in these pages, we aren't going to merely *talk* about prayer or *think* about praying.

No.

Get ready.

To pray.

Because life is just too impossible otherwise—yours, mine, everybody’s. We simply don’t have the luxury of playing nice with prayer. Not if we want things to change. Not if we want to be free—from whatever’s keeping us held down and held back. Not if we want our hearts whole and thriving and deep and grounded . . . different. Not if we want to reach our destinies and experience God’s promises. Not if we want our husbands and children living out what God has called them to do and be and become. Not if we want a fence of God’s protection around us. Not if we want to bear the unmistakable mark of His favor upon us. Not if we want the devil and his plans to go back to the hell where they came from.

But none of that is going to happen—no matter how badly we may want it—as long as prayer remains an afterthought, a formality, a mindless mix of duty and manipulation, something we do but usually don’t do, and rarely if ever do with any meaning and vitality, with confidence and clarity. As a result, we waste a whole lot of years, doing a whole lot of other things. Things that thoroughly exhaust us but ultimately don’t work. We end up, for all our trying, missing the point, missing out on what God intended, missing the whole heart of what really matters. So now we’re going to pray specifically and strategically.

Praying with *precision* is key. When we pray about the places where we seriously suspect the enemy is at work—that’s how we keep our prayers focused, not only on particular situations but on biblical truths that are consistent

with maintaining victory in the midst of them. It's how our praying stays integrated with reality, rather than aimlessly wandering down a side, spiritual hallway that never seems to connect with the living room, where we, you know . . . live. It's how we keep our whole selves engaged and alert, trusting God for the right things, confident He's giving them, able to sense His direction about what to do and then to take action accordingly.

If all we're doing is flinging words and emotions in all directions without any real consideration for the specific ways the enemy is targeting us and the promises of God that apply to us, we're mostly just wasting our time. We're adding to the confusion while not really making a noticeable dent in the problem or the process. We're fighting to keep our heads above water, yet feeling pretty sure on most days we're fighting a losing battle.

Well, part of that idea is right: *WE ARE in a battle*. A battle with a long history that reaches back before the annals of time began. But it's one in which the victor has already been determined. A battle, yes. But a *losing battle*?

Not. Even. Possible.

And prayer is our not-so-secret weapon in the fight. I'd even venture to say, our most potent one.

I'm willing to admit, right up front, there's an undeniable, unknowable, invisible mystery to prayer. That's why our first reaction to it often leans toward dismissing it, downplaying it, devaluing its critical importance. Prayer,

we think, is a good idea in theory, if only it actually did anything or made a difference. But here's the deal. Despite what we may or may not understand about prayer, God has deliberately chosen this particular vehicle as the one that drives His activity in people's lives. It's what He allows us to use to cooperate and partner with Him in the fulfilling of His will. He's created prayer as a primary way of putting us into personal contact with Him and with His eternal realities, any hour of the day or night.

So as we begin to grasp its significance, and as we practice implementing this incredible power tool He's placed in our hands, He divinely positions us—even a little life like ours—in His grand purposes for the ages. Through the connective tissue of prayer, He cracks open the door that makes us at least a small part of how these massive plans of His are translated into the lives of people we know.

Including ours.

Prayer is the portal that brings the power of heaven down to earth. It is kryptonite to the enemy and to all his ploys against you.

That's why you and I need this book. That's why this intersection of our life journeys in these pages is so crucial—not because of what I'm writing but because of what we are going to be doing with our time together—and what our God is going to be doing as a result.

You and I, once we've gotten just a little better acquainted, will begin actively crafting some prayer

strategies tailor-made for your victory. We're going to do it by touching on the areas of your life that the enemy is targeting the hardest—the bulk of what frustrates you, worries you, defeats you, exasperates you, angers you, taunts you, deflates you, and sometimes makes impossible demands on you. And if you come to a chapter that doesn't seem to strike a red-hot chord with you now, read it anyway, because sooner or later it will. And then, at the end of each chapter, you'll compose a strategy of prayer in regard to your own life in that particular area. Then with your personalized prayer strategies in place—yanked right out of this book (did you notice the perforated pages in the back?)—then posted where you can regularly see them and read them and launch them against the enemy's most well-disguised hideouts—you'll be able to fight back as hard (and harder) than the one who's fighting against you.

Strategies? Yes. Because as you may have noticed, the battles your enemy wages against you—especially the most acute, consistent ones—possess a personality to them, an intimate knowledge of who you are and the precise pressure points where you can most easily be taken down. Random accident? Lucky guess? I don't think so. These areas of greatest fear and anxiety in your life are clues to some important spiritual information. They reveal, among other things, that a personalized strategy has been insidiously put in place to destroy your vibrancy and render you defeated. It's been drawn up on the blackboard by someone

who knows where you live and whom you love, knows your customary tendencies, and knows from long experience how best to exploit every single one of them. And maybe up until now, it's been working.

But I assume, by your presence here, that you're sick of that. I know *I* most certainly am. Sick of losing these daily battles of mine. Sick of watching things deteriorate around me, as well as in the lives of those I care about. But what I'm beginning to understand is that I can't just go barreling into this fight blindly. I can't just throw something up against the wall and hope it sticks. I need a plan. Just as *you* need a plan. A strategy for war.

And funneled through the experiences outlined in this book, as well as through the specific work of God's Spirit in your life and (most importantly) the living power of God's Word, a number of personal prayer strategies will begin to develop. You're going to march out of here with some battle options that will not only help you deflect every assault trained against you but will allow you to actively advance against them—against scrappy, tenacious opposition. You'll be able to tread across stretches of high-voltage ground that you've never known how to navigate before, places that have always seemed too impossible to figure out. Through prayer you'll not only be able to defend yourself from incoming sniper fire but through Almighty God will be able to push into enemy territory and take . . . stuff . . . back.

Trust me, it can happen.

It *will* happen.

But not by happenstance. God's plan for you is to move you into a position of impact by infusing you with truth and employing you in prayer. You don't need to be a genius to do it. You don't need to learn ten-dollar words and be able to spout them with theological ease. You just need to bring your honest, transparent, available—and, let's just say it—your fed-up, over-it, stepped-on-your-last-nerve self, and be ready to become fervently relentless. All in His name.

At the end of the day, the enemy is going to be sorry he ever messed with you. You're about to become his worst nightmare a million times over. He thought he could wear you down, sure that after a while you'd give up without much of a fight.

Well, just wait till he encounters the fight of God's Spirit in you.

Because . . .

This.

Means.

War.

OPENING IN PRAYER



To anybody else this photo probably wouldn't mean anything. No one would pay a lot of money or give large amounts of their attention to it. It wouldn't be to them the personal treasure it is to me. Because to them, it'd be just a photo. A random image.

Of two hands.

One of the hands, as you see, is wrinkled and worn. Visibly older. A couple of the nails are a bit bruised and tattered. There's no jewelry to adorn any finger. And no real attempt at cosmetic touches. It's just plain. Simple. Strong and storied, yet nobly, humbly feminine.

The second hand in the picture, lying just overtop the fingers of the first, is much younger and smoother. Brown—same color as the other, though with a skin texture that's still evenly composed and supple. Nails fairly neat and a tad

more youthful. A ring on the fourth finger. Together, they're a quick portrait in chronological contrast.

But what I really love about this picture is what's lying beneath these two hands. That old spiral notebook. Grocery-store quality. A dollar forty-nine, plus tax, on sale. No expensive leather binding or intricately designed, acid-free paper. Just a fourth-grade composition book with wide-ruled, lined sheets and a plastic-coated cover.

And yet within those pages, bound by thin, metal rings slightly mashed out of shape by the pressure of frequent use, are the vast treasures of a living legacy.

These two hands—older and younger—belong to a grandmother and her granddaughter. And this spiral-bound filing cabinet contains a grandmother's prayer requests—written out, printed off, and prayed over, during her daily appointment with Jesus. She meets with Him the way she'd meet with any important friend—faithfully, personally, punctually. And in those early morning moments, she opens up this book of prayer and vocalizes her needs to Him, as well as the needs of others—requests she's been quietly gathering amid her daily dealings.

These two women, though separated by several decades of life experiences, go out together occasionally on little afternoon dates. And since a ninety-five-year-old metabolism can afford to indulge a predilection for McDonald's French fries and vanilla milk shakes, that's their usual outing. They drive through for a batch of that salty-sweet,

hot-and-cold combination, then they meander random neighborhood streets, windows down, while the lip-smacking passenger munches to her heart's delight. But it's also in these moments, between her grandmother's swallows, when this grown grandchild seeks to absorb the treasured wisdom from nearly a century of holy living.

Recently on one of these fast-food sprees, when the subject of prayer came up, the younger asked the older why she wrote down her prayers in a notebook like that. Then she waited, even pushing the "record" button on her iPhone, hoping not to miss a word of what she knew would be a long, deeply spiritual answer—one she'd never want to forget and could pass down in her grandmother's own voice for generations to come.

They glanced at each other. No one spoke for a few moments. Another french fry. Long gulp of milk shake. Then came these understated words:

"So I won't forget."

Hmmh. And there you have it. The message of this whole book in one simple phrase. Straight from the tender lips of a godly grandma. You write out your prayers so you "won't forget" . . .

- won't forget who the real enemy is
- won't forget the One in whom your hope lies
- won't forget your real need and dependencies are

- and later, won't forget the record of how God responds

Through intentional, deliberate, strategic prayer, you grab hold of Jesus and of everything He's already done on your behalf. It's how you tap into the power of heaven and watch it reverberate in your experiences. It's a key part of your offensive weaponry against a cunning foe who prowls around and watches for your weaknesses, your vulnerable places, for any opportunity to destroy you. In prayer you gain your strength—the power to gird yourself with armor that extinguishes every weapon your enemy wields.

Paul the apostle famously said it like this:

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.
(Eph. 6:11 NLT)

There's that word again. *Strategies*. Schemes and deceptive plots being concocted for your demise by a very real enemy who is always primed to make his next move. He works overtime to destroy the relationships and circumstances you want to preserve. He laughs at your attempts to fix your own issues with timely words and hard work—tactics that might affect matters for a moment but can't begin to touch his underhanded, cunning efforts down where the root issues lie, or up in those spiritual “heavenly places” where

such physical weapons were never meant to work. “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies—”

- “but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world,”
- “against mighty powers in this dark world,”
- “and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.”
(v. 12 NLT)

So we strap on weapons that work—weapons divinely authorized for our success in spiritual warfare: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace. Then we take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, as well as the sword—the very Word of God. But we don’t stop there. Because neither does Paul in his description of our spiritual armor in Ephesians 6—

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion.
Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all
believers everywhere. And pray . . . (vv. 18–19 NLT)

There it is. The fuel that drives everything. *Prayer*. We pray till our hands are worn and wrinkled. We pray until our granddaughters are old enough to understand and learn and copy our example. We pray until they can one day place their hands across ours, gently rubbing our aging skin, and we smile because now they’ll never forget the things we had the good sense to record in writing for their generation. They will look back on our legacies and know we stood

strong, fought the good fight, and finished a race in which we would *not even think* about letting the enemy have his way in our lives or in the lives of those we love.

We pray because our own solutions don't work and because prayer deploys, activates, and fortifies us against the attacks of the enemy. We pray because we're serious about taking back the ground he has sought to take from us.

That's what we do. And I hope it's what *you* do—or what you've come here to be renewed in doing. But make no mistake, this enemy will seek to discourage you from doing it. Dissuade you. Disarm you by putting a distaste for prayer in your mouth. He wants to see you passionless, powerless, and prayerless. Quiet. And because prayer is the divinely ordained mechanism that leads you into the heart and the power and the victory of Christ, he knows you'll remain defeated and undone without it. Tired and overwhelmed. Inching forward but mostly backward. Trying to figure out why the hope and enthusiasm you feel in church doesn't follow you to the four walls you live within.

And if I were your enemy, that's exactly what I'd want. I'd want to make you devalue the most potent weapons in your arsenal. I'd strategize against you, using carefully calculated methods to disorient and defeat you.

In fact, this approach makes so much devilish sense that it's exactly what the devil *does* do—to *you*, in *real life*—all under the umbrella of deception. He comes at you to . . . well, don't just listen to me; hear it from the loud voices who

responded when I polled a large cross section of women, asking them to tell me the primary ways the enemy attacks them. After boiling down all their answers into the most common categories of responses, I ended up with what I believe to be a top ten of his favorite strategies. Here's where he seems to direct them against you the hardest:



Strategy 1—Against Your Passion

He seeks to dim your whole desire for prayer, dull your interest in spiritual things, and downplay the potency of your most strategic weapons (Eph. 6:10–20).

Strategy 2—Against Your Focus

He disguises himself and manipulates your perspective so you end up focusing on the wrong culprit, directing your weapons at the wrong enemy (2 Cor. 11:14).

Strategy 3—Against Your Identity

He magnifies your insecurities, leading you to doubt what God says about you and to disregard what He's given you (Eph. 1:17–19).

Strategy 4—Against Your Family

He wants to disintegrate your family, dividing your home, rendering it chaotic, restless, and unfruitful (Gen. 3:1–7).

Strategy 5—Against Your Confidence

He constantly reminds you of your past mistakes and bad choices, hoping to convince you that you're under God's judgment rather than under the blood (Rev. 12:10).

Strategy 6—Against Your Calling

He amplifies fear, worry, and anxiety until they're the loudest voices in your head, causing you to deem the adventure of following God too risky to attempt (Josh. 14:8).

Strategy 7—Against Your Purity

He tries to tempt you toward certain sins, convincing you that you can tolerate them without risking consequence, knowing they'll only wedge distance between you and God (Isa. 59:1–2).

Strategy 8—Against Your Rest and Contentment

He hopes to overload your life and schedule, pressuring you to constantly push beyond your limits, never feeling permission to say no (Deut. 5:15).

Strategy 9—Against Your Heart

He uses every opportunity to keep old wounds fresh in mind, knowing that anger and hurt and bitterness and unforgiveness will continue to roll the damage forward (Heb. 12:15).

Strategy 10—Against Your Relationships

He creates disruption and disunity within your circle of friends and within the shared community of the body of Christ (1 Tim. 2:8).



And that's just ten of 'em—ten of the most usual ways he strategizes against the strength of God's woman.

Well, two can play at that game. And with God on our side taking the lead in setting our own strategy plans, we're already in the vast majority. But we must still be diligent and intentional. We must recognize and cry out against the highly personalized attacks being thrown in our direction. No, there's no need to fear, but we'd better be on our guard. And we'd better not ever forget—like the grandmother in the picture says—to keep praying with purpose and precision, the way she prays for people like her granddaughter.

A granddaughter who just happens to be . . .

Me.

My name is written in that book of hers. Has been for decades. She's prayed for me since before I was born, asking God to gird and strengthen, to guide and sustain.

That was back when she, like me, once wore a wedding ring on one of those precious fingers, before her husband of more than fifty years, my grandfather, went ahead of her into heaven. But it occurs to me, as I look back at this photograph, that the wedding ring on *my* hand—and the strong, happy, trial-tested marriage it represents—is not attributable to my own abilities and fine behavior as much as it's a direct result of my name being in her book and of her firm resolve to fight for me. For my husband. For our family.

My grandmother, Annie Eleen Cannings—the woman to whom I've dedicated this book—has gone to war for me. On her knees. In prayer.

Fervent prayer.

And I've decided I want to follow her there.

So with my grandmother's keen instructions in tow, and with the truth of God's Word as my anchor on ultimate truth and reality, I've started the well-worn, proven discipline of writing down my prayers. I began by considering my most pressing dilemmas—the ones raging in my own heart, my family, my finances, my health, my ministry—and then started writing down my own battle plans for dealing with them, based on the truths of Scripture. I resolved to stop using physical means to fight battles that require spiritual

remedies, using instead the power of prayer to do what it's always been designed to do.

I'm certainly not perfect at it, but I'm trying to grow.

They're posted in my closet now. My prayers, I mean. Seriously. Some are on full sheets of lined paper. Others are on little slivers of computer paper, ripped away after only a sentence or two. Or even just a word or two. But big or small, I've dated them and posted them all. And now, there they sit, taped right above a row of hooks in the closet where I see them every time I get dressed.

That way, I won't forget.

Those strategies help me remember to pray. And *what* to pray. And in doing so, I get dressed up in my spiritual armor, even while I'm getting dressed for the day.

That's what this book is all about. From my grandmother's heart to yours. Leading you to deliberately and thoughtfully write down your prayer strategies—tearing them right out of this book if you like—then posting them in a strategic place where you can pray them regularly and consistently.

INTO PRAYER

Couple of things to mention here, though, before we start to develop some intentional strategies of devil-busting prayer, designed to counteract his specific strategies against us. Whenever the conversation of demonic activity comes up in a book like this, most people scatter to one of two

extremes. Either they *overestimate* Satan's influence and power, living with an inflated, erroneous perspective of his abilities. Or they *underestimate* him. They don't assign him any credit at all for the difficulties he's stirring up beneath the surface of their lives. One extreme leaves you saddled with undue fear and anxiety; the other just makes you stupid—(*too blunt to say it like that? sorry*)—unaware and completely open to every single attack.

Which of these categories do you fall into or lean toward? Either?

Let's be clear, no matter which way you gravitate, *Satan is not God*. And he is not God's counterpart or peer. They're not even on the same playing field. His influence, authority, and power don't even touch the fringe of what our Lord is capable of doing. Read ahead to Revelation 19 and 20 sometime, the so-called titanic clash of end-time foes in what's commonly known as the battle of Armageddon. Know what it really is? More like the devil and his demons getting all dressed up with no place to go. It's over before it even starts. The only thing that makes it a war is that he becomes a *prisoner* of war. Satan is nothing but a copycat, trying desperately to convince you he's more powerful than he actually is. Because remember: he does have limitations—boundaries he cannot cross no matter how much he desires or how hard he tries. For instance . . .

- He can't be everywhere at once (only God is omnipresent).
- He can't read your mind (only God is omniscient).
- He is merely an illusionist, using cunning trickery to deceive and mislead (only God can work flat-out, unmistakable miracles).

And last, but certainly not least . . .

- He's running out of time (our God is eternal).

So even though he's been given temporary clearance to strategize and antagonize, we don't need to pray from a position of fear or weakness against him. Quite the opposite. You and I, coming to the Father through the mighty name of Jesus, can pray like the victorious saints of God we've been empowered to be. And we can expect to prevail. *But* we can't expect to experience this power unless we're serious about joining the battle in prayer.

All right, then—before we get going—here are just a few bits and pieces of framework that might help you in getting started. We'll be using these reminders throughout to help the prayers you write stay anchored and strong:

- **P—Praise:** Thanksgiving is one of the most important aspects of prayer. It's not just a means of warming up (or buttering up). It's not just a preamble before getting down to what we really came to say. Gratitude to God for who He is and what He's

already done should thread throughout every prayer because ultimately His name and His fame are the only reasons any of this matters.

- **R**—*Repentance*: God’s real desire, in addition to displaying His glory, is to claim your heart and the hearts of those you love. So prayer, while it’s certainly a place to deal with the objectives and details we want to see happening in our circumstances, is also about what’s happening on the inside, where real transformation occurs. Expect prayer to expose where you’re still resisting Him—not only resisting His *commands* but resisting the manifold blessings and benefits He gives to those who follow. Line your strategies with repentance: the courage to trust, and turn, and walk His way.
- **A**—*Asking*: Make your requests known. Be personal and specific. Write down details of your own issues and difficulties as they relate to the broader issue we discussed in that chapter, as well as how you perhaps see the enemy’s hand at work in them or where you suspect he might be aiming next. You’re not begging; you’ve been invited to ask, seek, and knock. God’s expecting you. He’s wanting you here. The best place to look is to Him.
- **Y**—*Yes*: “All of God’s promises,” the Bible says, “have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding ‘Yes!’” (2 Cor. 1:20 NLT). You may not understand what all’s

happening in your life right now, but any possible explanation pales in comparison to what you *do* know because of your faith in God's goodness and assurances. So allow your prayer to be accentuated with His own words from Scripture, His promises to you that correspond to your need. (I'll provide lots of options in each chapter to choose from.) There is nothing more powerful than praying God's own Word.

Praying like this, you can expect God to respond in accordance with His own sovereign, eternal will and His boundless love for you. Or as someone more clever than I has said . . .

Prayer

Releases

All

Your

Eternal

Resources

I like that.

But if you're still uneasy about it all, if you're not sure you'll know how to get the hang of this . . . no worries. With the next page you turn, you're entering the prayer strategy zone. And I guarantee you, God's Spirit is going to show you exactly how to get started.

Speaking of which . . . why don't we do just that: get started.

If you've had it, then let's do it.

Let's get after it.

Let's pray.

STRATEGY 1

YOUR PASSION

GETTING IT BACK WHEN IT'S GONE



If I were your enemy, I'd seek to dim your passion, dull your interest in spiritual things, dampen your belief in God's ability and His personal concern for you, and convince you that the hope you've lost is never coming back—and was probably just a lie to begin with.

Fervent prayer is fueled by passion.

By faith. By fire.

When everything else inside you is pulling you in twenty million different directions—off to the next busy thing in your busy day, if not off to bed and off the clock—passion is

what plasters your knees to that floor. And digs in for dear life. It's your oomph. Your hutzpah. Your cutting edge.

Passion is what pushes the athlete to run one more lap, to crunch through one more set of reps. It's what silences those screaming thigh and stomach muscles, making them do what their owner demands of them, no matter how loudly they complain. *Passion* is what keeps a piano player anchored to the practice bench when no one else is around to notice the effort or give a pat on the back for approval. *Passion* is what inspires the eager young employee to outperform expectations, instead of just punching the clock to earn a paycheck like everybody else. *Passion* is what burns up the road between a child in danger and a parent in pursuit. It glows red-hot. And goes on driving. And grows even larger, the larger the obstacles become.

Passion is the fuel in the engine of your purpose. It's your "want-to." It's what keeps you going when mundane tasks bore you or difficult ones dissuade you. Passion is what keeps you moving in the direction your best intentions want you to go.

That's why, if I were your enemy, I'd make stealing your *passion* one of my primary goals. Because I know if I could dim your passion, I could significantly lower your resistance to temptation and discouragement. I could make you walk with a spiritual limp and lengthen how long it takes you to recover from the injury. If I could chip away at your zeal, at your hope, at your belief in God and what He can do, I

could chisel down your faith to a whimper. Make you want to quit. And never try again. I'd cup an ear in your direction, hear nothing in your voice that sounds like anything but token prayer, and snicker at my success. Chalk another one up to my "Passion Elimination Plan"—the one with your name on it.

That's what I'd do. If I were your enemy.

I'd weaken your passion, your cutting edge—knowing full well that weak, impotent prayers (or better yet, prayerlessness) would follow right behind.

So take a long, hard, deep look at yourself and answer this question: Have you lost your passion? Has you get-up-and-go simply gotten-up-and-gone?

Maybe you've prayed and prayed for the same thing, over and over. . . . Maybe you've wanted God's will so bad, and wanted life to look different for so long. . . . Maybe you're feeling utterly discouraged or disappointed right now and not sure why you keep being surprised every time the same ol' thing keeps happening again and again. . . . Maybe other demands and distractions have leaked into your heart over time, crowding out space where older, nobler priorities once ruled. I get all of that. I've felt a lot of that.

But what makes you think it's somehow all *God's* fault? Or *your* fault? Or *everybody else's* fault? But never the *enemy's* fault? Why aren't we equally as quick to recognize the telltale marks of *his* darkened ideas and initiative?

When you can't seem to respond to spiritual stimuli with the same optimism and obedience as you once did, why do you think it could only be attributable to your bad character? To a drop in your hormone levels? To the normal deterioration that comes from age and accumulated adversity?

Maybe another less noticeable but equally probable reason is that you've been a victim of satanic sabotage. It's a *strategy*. Against *you*. On *purpose*. An assault launched with pinpoint planning and detail.

I mean, think about it. Doesn't it fit the profile?

Satan is a full-time *accuser*. He does it "day and night," the Bible says (Rev. 12:10). Instead of *convicting* you for the purpose of restoration, as God's Spirit does, he *condemns* you for the purpose of destroying, humiliating.

This pattern, by the way, is classic proof of the enemy's influence. Watch for it, and note his fingerprints. *Condemnation* always leads to guilt-laden discouragement, while *conviction*—though often painful in pointing out our wrongdoing—still somehow encourages and lifts us, giving us hope to rebuild on. The first makes you focus on yourself; the other points you to the grace and empowering mercy of Christ. To hear the devil tell it, these weaknesses of yours are reason for nothing but wretched despair; yet God says those same weaknesses are reason for your purest worship and gratitude. Your need for God's grace is supposed to be a passion enhancer. That's the *opposite* of what takes place, however, as soon as you start believing the enemy's

accusations. He'll make you think God doesn't hear your prayers or respond to them—why?—because of *you*.

How typical. Because Satan, in addition to being an accuser, is also a confirmed *liar*. No . . . worse. He's the "father of lies" (John 8:44). The granddaddy of all untruth. Deception is the overarching umbrella that encompasses all His plans and programs.

He warps your perspective on the current events in your life until reality appears much worse and more desperate than it truly is. I'm not saying your situation is not legitimately bad; perhaps it is painful beyond description. But through his lying eyes, any passion for perseverance seems like a silly, sentimental waste of time. And yet he has the gall to insinuate that *God* is the one who lies to you, that any delay in the Lord's visible response to your prayer is open-and-shut evidence that He doesn't really hear you like He says. Or if He does, He apparently doesn't mind seeing you writhe in discomfort while you wait on His own sweet timing.

Such biting accusations against you, against God.

Such bitter lies about what's really taking place.

Those are just some of the ways he tries to eat away at your passion. Not overtly and conspicuously. He's much too crafty for that. But cunningly. Slowly. Incrementally. Over time.

And sometimes he gets us. We don't recognize it's him at first, working behind the scenes. We think the reason

we've stopped praying is because—oh, “we just don't feel like it anymore.” And sure—maybe, *maybe*, that's the way it really is. But possibly, *possibly*, this lack of feeling is a clue that the enemy's strategy has begun to take effect. He's worked you down enough until you can't seem to muster up the will to fight back, to keep believing for and praying about . . .

Your marriage . . . still hopelessly tense and broken.

Your child . . . still rebelling against all sound logic.

Your money . . . still not enough to feel like enough.

Your health . . . still as chronic or scary as ever.

Your addictions . . . still defeating you way too often.

You just can't seem to bring these up to God anymore because there doesn't seem to be any spiritual fire burning inside. Maybe even right now—even while reading a book that's inviting you back where you once walked, back to fervent, believing prayer—you honestly just don't see the point in going there again.

So here's what I'd say to you. *Let's start here.* Praying for this. To recover and maintain your passion. To regain and sustain your cutting edge.

In order to do it, I want to take you back to a real-life story that God placed in Scripture (2 Kings 6:1–7) for just such a moment as this. And I want to use it and the principles it teaches to encourage your heart and then help you begin stirring up a strategy to *get your passion back*. Because if you're not at a low-passion point right now, the time will

likely come when you'll feel yourself being tugged there. And when that season comes, make a note to put this story on your must-read list.

As it happened, the prophet Elisha was standing near one of his protégés, who was chopping down a tree at the banks of the Jordan River, laboring to gather the raw materials needed for building a larger meeting place. But at one point in either an upswing or a downswing, the iron head of that man's ax wiggled loose from its wooden handle and sailed into the water, plopping to the bottom.

[Splash.] [Gasp.]

And just like that, he'd lost his cutting edge.

The young prophet was horrified. Not only had he lost the one tool on hand—the most important tool in the toolbox for moving him toward the outcome he desired—but the ax he'd been using had been borrowed from a friend. The ker-plunk of that dead weight in the water was a double whammy of disappointment and disgust. He couldn't go forward with his building project, and now he'd need to go to the person who'd loaned him the ax and tell what happened to it, that he'd broken it, lost it, that there was no getting it back.

Notice, though, these encouraging details from the story:

Number 1: *Despite the lost ax head, the presence of God was still near.* In ancient Israel, Yahweh's prophets were representations of His presence and power with His people. So

when the man in this story lost the ax head, the fact that the prophet Elisha was right there alongside him (v. 3) wasn't just a simple comfort. It mattered that Elisha had seen how hard this man had worked, all the trees he'd chopped down, and how his cutting edge had been lost. It mattered that God's presence and the man's loss occurred within close proximity to the other. Satan would like to convince you that your lack of passion is an indication that God was either never there at all or has gotten disgusted with you and left. He wants you to believe that God has not seen your struggle and is unaware or disinterested in the details of your life. But just because you're feeling at a loss for words and "want-to"—just because your "cutting edge" in prayer seems misplaced for now—does not mean that God isn't close by.

Number 2: *The servant was doing something good when he lost his cutting edge.* He was being productive, building a new dwelling for himself and for those others involved in the school of the prophets (v. 2). In fact, if he hadn't been working so hard—if he'd just been sitting around doing nothing—there's little chance the ax would've ever become gradually loosened and ultimately dislodged. This tells me that being engaged in good, even godly, productive things is not an automatic guard against losing your cutting edge. In fact, one of Satan's dirtiest little tactics is to sneak in and steal it while you're square in the middle of investing yourself in worthwhile activities. That's why when you're sensing a drag in your faith, in your spiritual fire, it can sometimes

simply mean you're doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing . . . and doing it well, at that.

Number 3: *The ax was borrowed* (v. 5). The presence of passion, faith, and belief in our hearts is a gift. It's on loan to our souls. Like the man's ax, our passion and spiritual fervor come from Someone else as a gift to us. If you've ever cried out passionately to God in faith, fully believing that He is able to do more than you ask or think or imagine, it's only because He first stirred up that passion within you. So instead of always feeling guilty—personally responsible—whenever your passion in prayer is weak or missing, realize instead that it is God's work both to give it and then to fan it into flame inside you. Which means you cannot manufacture it on your own. Your enemy, however—coy as he is—wants to burden you with blame for not having something that didn't originate with you in the first place. Don't fall for that.

Number 4: *Only a work of God could retrieve the ax head*. "Where did it fall?' the man of God asked. When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it into the water at that spot. Then the ax head floated to the surface" (v. 6 NLT). Miraculously, by Elisha's hand, the slab of iron rustled free from the murky riverbed and bobbed up to the surface as if it were nothing but a floating chunk of driftwood. There it was! His cutting edge was back! Divinely recovered. Elisha's servant had understandably been convinced there was no hope of ever seeing it again.

And there *wouldn't* have been . . . except that he went to Elisha. God, through the prophet, stepped in and made it reappear. If the ax head had just dropped onto the ground, anybody who saw where it went—including the man himself—could've picked it up and salvaged it. Instead it was deep in the river. Only a miracle could get it back.

Just like *you* might need a miracle to get *yours* back, too, if it's sunk to the bottom—like everyone's passion for prayer has done at one time or another.

Listen to me. Nothing—*nothing!*—is too far gone that your God cannot resurrect it. Even your cutting edge. So go to Him to get it back. Don't try to regain it yourself. Don't set your hopes on other people or circumstances to fuse it back into the fiber of your being. Trust it into God's care. Only His miraculous work can make it bubble back up to the surface where it belongs. And He is more than willing to do it.

CALL TO PRAYER

So here we go. Before we tackle and craft prayer strategies for the nine other topics in this book, the seminal matter of getting and maintaining our cutting edge so that we even *want* to pray again is foundational.

But when we talk about *passion* in prayer, I sure don't want to leave the impression that the only prayer God hears is the kind that's spoken at high volume, with sweat and

tears and shaking fists and extraordinary energy. Prayer can be *silent* and still seethe with passion. And on some days, at some times, prayer—for any of us—can start out as simply an obedient appointment, an act of discipline, showing up in that prayer closet because it's the appointed time that we said we'd be there.

Because praying—reaching outward and upward to Him—is the way His passion comes down. Even prayers that begin with the blunt edge of willpower, dragging your heart along kicking and screaming, can soon begin to shine with the *cutting edge* of hope, faith, and passionate confidence in Christ. Once the wind of God's Spirit starts blowing, you're no longer praying rote, innocuous prayers. Instead, you're praying deliberate prayers. Prayers that are as personalized and devastating as the enemy's attacks against you. Strategic prayers. Powerful prayers. Prayers that tell the enemy his cover has been blown, his number has come up, and his game is done. Prayers built on the promises of God that entreat Him to give you back what He was responsible for giving you in the first place.

Infuse your first prayer strategy with passages and promises like these:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51:10)



The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
for His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is Your faithfulness. (Lam. 3:22–23)



I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the
LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be
their God, for they will return to Me with their
whole heart. (Jer. 24:7)



Call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I
will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me
when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jer.
29:12–13)



The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and
the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your
God with all your heart and with all your soul, so
that you may live. (Deut. 30:6)



Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)



For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:34)



I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 36:26 HCSB)

Don't read that last one too quickly, OK? One more time. Slowly. Deliberately. Like how you'd sip a glass of sweet tea on a blazing hot summer day, wanting the refreshment to last.

Do you see the promise? "I will *give* you." "I will *remove* your heart of stone" and "*give* you" a heart that's alive and tender again, one that's beating and responsive again. Engaged again. Able to believe again.

A prayer that's seeking passion should not be about manufacturing a better feeling or jostling up a better mood. It's simply about holding out your open hands—in thanksgiving first, in gratitude for God's faithfulness and His goodness and His assured, accomplished victory over the enemy. Then asking. Asking for what He already wants to give you.

Then waiting (expecting) to receive the promise of newness and freshness from His Spirit as you go along, more each day—praying until, as the prophet Hosea said . . .

He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain
watering the earth. (Hos. 6:3)

How does a person receive rain? Not by prying it loose from the sky but just by watching it fall, by standing in the downpour, by thanking Him for opening up the floodgates and sending what He knows we need and can't get for ourselves, yet what He so faithfully, regularly, and graciously gives.

Let's get going, then . . . with just these few little verses to get you started. Grab a pen, flip to the pages for prayer in the back of this book, and write your own prayer strategy for passion—a prayer for God to help you maintain it (if it's good) or regain it (if it's gone). Make it part *Praise*, part *Repentance*, part *Asking*, and a whole lot of *Yes*.

But don't just *read* the words you've crafted. *Pray them*. No matter if your writing is short, long, or somewhere in between, pray it as the steady, fervent desire of your will, in anticipation of seeing it become the burning desire of your heart. Because it's not just another do-better in your list of New Year's resolutions. It's a prayer strategy.

And *that's* what makes it work.