I have a confession to make to you today: I’m a pastor—responsible for providing spiritual leadership for our church family...but I’m often slow to tune into spiritual reality. I guess you could say I’m “spiritually challenged.” My tendency is to view circumstances on a human or material plane while failing to see the spiritual reality behind them. When there is tension in my relationship with my wife Greta (as I’m sure you’d suspect, it’s usually her fault 😜), I find myself dwelling on the wrong I see her doing or thinking through my own shortcomings. When misunderstanding exists between my children and me, I get frustrated with them or am too hard on myself for my flaws as a parent. When I face challenges at church personally or when our staff encounters opposition I can feel anxiety rising and my natural response is to begin problem solving—figuring out what I or we can do better. As much as anyone, I need to be reminded of the truth of the Apostle Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Fortunately, the longer I walk with Jesus, the quicker I am to tune into spiritual reality. It used to take me weeks or months to recognize that the nature of whatever difficulty I was encountering was spiritual and usually someone else needed to call it to my attention. I’m getting better, but it’s still a challenge for me to see with Spirit eyes. I know I’m not alone in this—we all have the tendency to see things on a material/human plane and miss the fact that the spiritual battle we’re all in is the backdrop against which everything in life occurs.

The title of today’s sermon, “Seeing With Spirit Eyes,” sums up my desire for what I’d like to see happen for people throughout our church family as our staff and I preach over the next six weeks—a sermon titled, “Our Struggle.” My hope is that every follower of Jesus who hears these messages is more fully equipped to see with Spirit eyes. Admittedly, the subject of spiritual warfare is a tricky one, fraught with pitfalls. In his classic novel, The Screwtape Letters—written nearly 75 years ago—C.S. Lewis insightfully wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their
existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

Lewis is right. We tend to gravitate toward one of two extremes when it comes to spiritual warfare...either ignoring the spiritual battle and dismissing its significance, or becoming preoccupied with it, seeing demons behind every tree and under every rock.

My goal in this series is to help us land in the sweet spot of recognizing the battle we’re in and seeing spiritual reality clearly, while also walking in the confidence that victory is ours in Christ. It’s dangerous for us to be oblivious to the battle or to be preoccupied with it. To try and strike that balance we’ll be relying heavily on Scripture, which has much to say to us about the nature of our struggle.

Because spiritual reality isn’t something many people are familiar with, there’s a lot of confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the topic. When I was new to ministry and just learning about spiritual warfare—it wasn’t something I was very familiar with growing up and didn’t learn much about through my college and seminary training—I remember asking my senior pastor, Ken Hepner, why the Bible wasn’t more explicit about the specifics of spiritual warfare—what it looks like and how we’re supposed to respond to it. I’ll never forget his answer. Pastor Ken said that the Bible isn’t written like a how-to manual because if it was, we’d rely on memorizing steps, rather than learning to know Jesus. **God’s goal in giving us the Bible is to point us toward the priority of relationship with Jesus, not having us memorize steps or learn formulas.** This is a critical reminder for us: The best way to learn about spiritual reality and to tune into the battle we’re in, is to draw close in relationship with Jesus and learn to know Him. The Holy Spirit will give us the insights we need and will guide us into all truth.

We’ll be looking at 2 passages of Scripture today. The first is found in 2 Kings 6:8-17. These verses remind us of the nature of our struggle. It’s a story I reflect on often, because I need to be reminded that no matter how bad things look to me or how they feel, there is more going on that I can see with my eyes or sense with my emotions. And I also find this passage of Scripture helpful in pointing others to spiritual reality.

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.” The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Will you not
tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?” “None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.” “Go, find out where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.” The report came back: “He is in Dothan.” Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Elisha and his servant were being used by God to thwart the attempts of the Aramean army to defeat the Israelites. When the Aramean king realized Elisha’s role he determined to capture the prophet and ordered his armies to surround the place where Elisha and his servant were staying. When Elisha’s servant saw they were surrounded he was distraught, but Elisha told him, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” v. 16 I’m convinced that this is the starting point for each of us in tuning into spiritual reality and engaging in spiritual battle. It’s easy to be overwhelmed with all that’s happening around us: relational tension with family members; pressure and anxiety at work; fears, concerns and doubts about the future; financial worries; sickness, illness or chronic pain that confronts us. Concerns like these can weigh us down and cause us to feel like we’re outnumbered and fighting a losing battle. We know God is with us, but when things are tough it can be hard to feel his presence and to know that He’s there for us. We lose sight of the fact that God is with us and his strength is greater than our enemy’s strength.

That’s the way Elisha’s servant responded. He only focused on his circumstances and lost sight of what God was doing. He got up in the morning, after a night of sleep, stretched, got himself a cup of coffee, looked outside and said, “Holy Cow! There are soldiers and chariots and horses everywhere.” Elisha and his servant were under siege—trapped by the Aramean army. The servant immediately went to Elisha—maybe even waking him up, because he was sleeping well that night—and said, “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” But Elisha was calm. His spiritual maturity and understanding had been forged in circumstances that appeared even more difficult than this one. He said, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And then Elisha asked God to open his servant’s eyes so he could see what Elisha saw. And God answered Elisha’s request, the servant was able to see the horses and
chariots of the Lord all around the house where they were staying. And God delivered Elisha and his servant. The enemy soldiers were blinded and God delivered Israel from what appeared to be certain defeat.

The 2nd passage of Scripture I want us to study this morning is one of the best known stories in the Bible—most people who have never read the Bible or have never been to church know this story—the story of David and Goliath. This account is found in 1 Samuel chapter 17. The plot is familiar—a small, young shepherd boy named David, with no armor and just a slingshot and 5 stones—did 1 on 1 battle with a seasoned warrior named Goliath—a giant of a man who was over 9 feet tall—who is armed to the hilt with a sword, spear and javelin. I’ll begin reading at verse 41 of 1 Samuel chapter 17:

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

The Israelites were at war with their arch enemy—the Philistines—and it appeared that the conflict was going to be determined by a young teen battling a seasoned veteran—who happened to be a 9-foot tall giant. But David didn’t see it that way. Listen to his perspective:

“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” And the battle went just as David said it would. David struck Goliath down with a
well—aimed stone to his forehead and then cut off his head. When the Israelite army recognized what had happened, they rallied and defeated the Philistines.

David’s encounter with Goliath is much more than just the story of a teen-ager with a slingshot killing a battle-tested warrior who carried all the latest weaponry. It’s the story of a teen who wasn’t intimidated by a giant that had immobilized the entire Israelite army with fear, because he saw reality correctly. David saw with spirit eyes and he understood that this wasn’t a battle between a small teen with a slingshot and a giant with a spear and sword. This was a battle between the forces of darkness and the almighty God and God would provide David and the Israelites with the victory.

When you and I encounter challenging situations in relationships, at work, at school, with our health or our job or finances our tendency is to respond in one of three ways: either we succumb to fear, doubt and worry; or we respond with anger and frustration; or, we try and push ahead in our own strength. These are natural, human responses, but ultimately, they aren’t productive. My challenge for us is to see with Spirit eyes, just as Elisha and David did, and rather than viewing our circumstances purely on a material/human level, respond with the understanding that the battle belongs to the Lord and He will deliver us.

I want to help us think through the implications these Bible stories have for us by having us consider four results of what happens, “When we see with Spirit eyes we...” When we see with Spirit eyes, we recognize the nature of the battle—Elisha and David both understood that the real battle wasn’t about powerful soldiers and massive armies. The battle is played out in front of us and it involves people and things we can discern with our senses, but all of that is set against a backdrop of spiritual reality. Our first step in engaging in the spiritual battle is recognizing the nature of the battle.

When we see with Spirit eyes we see that the odds are actually stacked in our favor. Elisha said, “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And David said, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.” Elisha and David understood that even though things looked bleak, it actually wasn’t a fair fight. God was on their side and they were going to win. Likewise, when we see with Spirit eyes we won’t resign ourselves to defeat we’ll see that God is on our side.
When we see with Spirit eyes we **understand the provisions we have in Christ.** We are not alone. We aren’t beaten down. In Jesus Christ we are victorious. The victory Jesus won at the cross over sin and over death is now ours. This is where we have a significant advantage over people like Elisha and David and other heroes and heroines of the Old Testament. As followers of Jesus, living after Jesus’ time on earth, we have the Holy Spirit living in us and acting through us.

Lastly, when we see with Spirit eyes we **embrace the power of prayer.** Prayer at its root is communication with God. And the very act of communicating with God—of praying—acknowledges that there is someone outside of ourselves who is in control. As our staff and I planned this series we realized that one of our desired outcomes for the series is pointing people toward prayer—encouraging them to pray and giving them opportunities to engage in prayer. When we see with Spirit eyes we understand the power of prayer for ourselves, for those we love, for our local community and our world and for ministry opportunities that surround us.

As we walk through this series, “OUR STRUGGLE,” over the next 5 weeks, my hope is that the Scriptures we explore and the truths we learn will equip us to view reality with Spirit eyes. I want us to be like Elisha, who even when he was surrounded by enemy forces who were trying to capture and kill him, was able to recognize, “**Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**” And I want us to be like young David, who even though he was heading into battle against a seeming unconquerable foe, was able to declare, “**It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.**”

**CLOSING...**

As we leave today, I’d like you to say these words from Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12 aloud with me:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”