

Removing Demonic Oppression

*Steps to freeing those
under the unwanted influence*

by Karl Payne

What do you say to a man who constantly battles feelings of inferiority, thoughts of suicide, or habitually hearing voices telling him he's a loser who will never measure up as a husband, dad, son, or child of God?

He tells you he's prayed, fasted, memorized Scripture, and studied his Bible, but the ideas, accusations, and voices never release their paralyzing grip, at least not for very long.

Do you tell him he just needs rest? That it's a chemical imbalance? Do you assume he's schizophrenic because he says there are voices in his head? Or might this battle be something more than physiological or psychological?

"Karl, do you think this could be demonic?" I've heard this question so many times I no longer presume the person speaking is neurotic or weak willed. This initial question is often followed by "Now I don't want you to think I am crazy" or "I'm afraid you won't believe me, but ..." or "I've never told anyone about this, but I assure you I am not making this up." I've heard this from the church and unchurched, from those in the pew and those who fill the pulpit.

What would you say to a pastor, for instance, who flies to your city to discuss demonization, indicating that his mind is being consumed with thoughts and images of his wife having sex with other men? It is not true, and he knows it. But the incessant mind games are not only personally debilitating emotionally and physically to him, they are in the process of destroying his marriage, family, and ministry.

Do you tell him to read his Bible? Well, he studies his Bible and memorizes Scripture, and he has written more theological books than most Christians have read. Do you tell him that he just needs to be more disciplined in his thinking?

Or might he be demonized?

Over the last 30 years, I have worked with hundreds of Christians across the denominational and non-denominational spectrum who are tormented by spirits they have not been able to remove on their own.

Laying the Foundation

There are some foundational truths to keep in mind as we tackle this topic.

First, assisting those caught in demonic bondage does not depend upon a particular type of giftedness. Some gifts may make this type of ministry easier for some than for others. But the authority, victory, protection, and position necessary for successfully banishing demons is something freely available to every Christian under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Second, your attitude toward demons is important. They are not superiors to fear or defer to. They are not colleagues to respect. Demons are not your spiritual equal or sparring partner. Positionally, they have been placed beneath the feet of all believers under the delegated authority of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

When you respond to a demon as an equal, you embolden it to resist and fight rather than submit to the authority the Lord Jesus Christ, which has been delegated to you (Luke 10:18-20; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 1:18-2:7).

Third, your personal involvement in the process is not nearly as important as the attitude of the person seeking deliverance. Prayer is powerful, but if the demonized person refuses to resist the demons or to confess and cancel the sin(s) that gave them ground (topos, from Eph. 4:27) those demons will not leave. You can stand with someone against the powers of darkness, but you cannot stand for someone against the powers of darkness. (A believing parent standing for a demonized child may be an exception.)

Demons leave because the demonized individual is willing to confess the sin(s) that provided the foothold (topos) in the first place and ask God to cancel the ground or permission given over to the demons.

Getting the Facts

When I first meet with an oppressed or demonized person, I listen carefully as they share their story. I follow up with questions to determine the person's relationship with Christ. Then I briefly describe the essential differences between battling the world, the flesh, and the devil (see sidebar). I then explain the importance of a person's will in relation to "submitting to God" and "resisting the devil" before "he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

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I explain how the process for removing demonic squatters involves confession of sin, canceling the ground surrendered to Satan, and commanding the removal of wicked spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus.

If we both believe demonization is a real possibility in this particular case, and if we both want to proceed, I give the person a homework assignment: reading Mark 7:21-23, Galatians 5:19-21, and Colossians 3:5-8 and preparing a list of possible areas of sin and demonization.

I also ask the person to list any other persistent problem areas not listed in these passages. For instance, none of those passages mention obsessive fear, suicidal depression, eating disorders, and constant self-condemning thoughts. But each of these can indicate a potential foothold for demonic control.

If the area is not habitual, I ask the person not to write it down. Demons are unrelenting. If they are present, they are persistent. They will not surface only once a month or on holidays. They like to hide, but they are aggressive in their attempts to control the thinking of anyone within whom they hold ground.

The Ground Rules

When we meet the second time, we go over the homework list. I ask questions for clarification, but I don't worry about particulars. Although specific areas are necessary to identify, all the sordid details are not.

I review the concepts of confessing and canceling sin, and the three necessary non-negotiables of (1) being a Christian, (2) absolute honesty, and (3) a will to resist the devil. If we are on the same page at this point, I will proceed. If not, we will close our meeting with prayer, but demons will not be confronted, at least not that particular day.

At this point, I lay down some ground rules, both for the person's benefit and for the reluctant obedience of any spirits present.

The ground rules are the single most important thing I do to help ensure that any confrontation will be orderly rather than becoming a circus. The less we allow demons to speak the better. Demons understand delegated authority and accept the fact that a Christian's delegated authority is greater than their authority.

The statement "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" precedes all the ground rules. The Lord Jesus Christ is our authority. The purpose of repeating his name is to make it clear to any demons that we understand Jesus Christ has already won this war.

So, for instance, I say, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be one-way traffic only, from [name of person] to the pit. When you leave, you will take all of your works and effects and all of your associates and their works and effects with you. You will not be free to re-enter [name] or to enter anyone else in the room.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, you may speak only that which can be used against you, and the answers you give must stand as truth before the white throne of God.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be no profanity.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ [name] is to have complete and full control of his tongue, mind, and body. You will not be allowed to control his tongue, mind, or body.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when I give commands, you will give clear, concise, complete answers in [name]'s mind to the questions addressed to you. You will not be permitted to confuse the mind of [name] and will be punished severely by the Holy Spirit of God if you attempt to do so."

Confronting the Spirits

With the ground rules in place, I ask the counselee to pick the two or three areas he would like us to check from his homework sheet, beginning with those areas that represent the greatest problems. Usually demons with the greater authority oversee those areas that represent greater problems. By going after the higher ranking spirits first, you can shorten the process. When the leaders go, they often take all those under their charge with them.

If the first area is, for instance, fear, I will say something like this: "We are going to deal with the area of fear because you told me it's a major problem. Before we confront demons, you will need to confess any sin(s) in this area."

The individual will then ask God to forgive him of the sin of fear that has dominated his life. It ultimately represents a lie that denies God's goodness and promise to always care for his children.

After the person confesses this sin as thoroughly as he knows how, I ask him to pray that God would cancel any and all grounds demons might hold against him through this area. Confession brings cleansing to a specific area. Canceling closes the door to the foothold that the person has given over to evil spirits. With the sin forgiven and the ground divinely removed, demons are now unwanted squatters rather than invited or tolerated guests.

At this point I will command: "If there are any demons working in [name] in the area of fear, we bind all of you together, along with all of your works and effects, and command that you come forward now. We command that spirit holding highest authority of all those bound and brought forward in the area of fear to step up alone."

Then I ask a few questions. I want to identify a demon's name, commissioning source, specific task, habitual lies, and the ground it still holds if any. Once the demonized person learns to recognize the demon's answers, usually described as a voice, words, thoughts, impressions, or "ideas that pop into my mind" in direct response to the questions being addressed, the process goes much faster.

I ask the individual to repeat to me, word for word, the voices, thoughts, words, impressions that he is hearing or thinking in response to my questions.

Here are the five questions I ask:

1. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command that spirit holding the highest authority working in the area of fear in [name] to step forward alone. What is your name?"

If there are demons present, they will answer. Sometimes it is easy. The person will say, "The name Destroyer just came in my mind." When this happens I will say, "You have responded to the name Destroyer. We bind you by that name, and upon command you will go to the pit bound by that name with all of your works and effects and all of your associates and their works and effects as well."

Sometimes the demon will try to mock God and to take control of the process. Once when I asked this question, the answer was: "We are not here. No one is working in that area. This is not necessary." I had to smile. And the man I was working with burst out in laughter saying, "This idiot just told me it is not there."

2. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who commissioned you in the work you are doing against [name]?"

The answer usually is Satan or some other similar title such as Lucifer or The Dark Lord.

3. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, what work have you been commissioned to do against [name]?"

The response to this is usually, "To destroy him or to kill him." My follow up question is: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by what means do you hope to destroy him?"

The answers will vary, but if it is really a demon, the answer will have something to do with the work it is trying to accomplish, for example: "Suicide. We tell her to take her life. We make her feel worthless so she will give up," or, "We are destroying her hope and her marriage by creating problems in her family."

4. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, what lies do you tell [name] on a habitual basis?"

Answers are often something like, "We tell her that God will not protect her. We torment her with fear, and she believes us." Or, "We tell her she will get sick and die, and that her husband does not really love her." Or, "We tell her she is stained, that she is unlovable, and that God could never accept someone like her." Or, "She is always alone and always will be. It is never going to change." The lies will consistently relate to the work they have been commissioned to carry out.

5. The most important question is: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, do you still hold any ground against [name] that would keep you from leaving him upon command?"

The answer is usually, "No, our ground is gone." If the response is yes, I immediately ask, "Will your answer that you still hold ground stand as truth before the great white throne of God?" The response is usually, "No, it won't."

With the sin forgiven and their ground removed, demons are now unwanted squatters rather than invited or tolerated guests.

Once the answer is, "We hold no more ground" or something similar, you have everything you need to command it to leave. Once the ground is gone, the demon will leave upon command.

I have found that when demons give arrogant answers, it's usually because they don't think you will uncover the ground they hold against the person. When they hold

the area of ancestral sin, for instance, they are certain you will never uncover it, leaving them free to continue their destructive work.

I now have the person address ancestral issues with the initial confession and canceling of sin, just in case. I ask them to pray something like: "Lord Jesus, if there are any spirits who have anything to do with me, body, soul, or spirit because of ancestral sin, I ask you to forgive this sin(s) and cancel any ground held against me because of ancestral sin."

Closing the Door

Two things are left to bring this first area (fear) to closure. You must command the demons to leave and ask the Holy Spirit to fill every area the demons have vacated. I have the counselee repeat a command with me and remind him that we are commanding as victors, not pleading as victims.

We pray: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, [demon's name], to leave [person's name] with all your works and effects and all your associates and their works and effects, and go to the pit right now. We command this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and our Savior. Amen."

I then ask the person to pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to fill and control the areas just vacated. Matthew 12:25-45 indicates that after expelling a demon, it is necessary to fill the room(s) it has worked in or attached to with someone stronger than it. When we allow the Holy Spirit to control every area of our lives, we eliminate a demon's ability to control those areas.

After we deal with each issue, I repeat this same process for each remaining area of concern. The last thing to do is commanding the highest ranking spirit, other than the Holy Spirit, to come forward. If any demon(s) have been missed, we deal with it in the same way.

When the entire process is complete, I ask the individual to do three things: (1) Practice keeping short accounts with sin. (2) Practice both defensive and offensive prayer. Ask God both for protection and to destroy those trying to destroy you. (3) Practice daily Bible study, and apply what you learn rather than just read or memorize it. Jesus responded to Satan's solicitations with Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11). We are always wise to do the same.

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Three-Front Warfare: the World, the Flesh, the Devil

Opposition to God comes from at least three areas, each of which requires specific resistance.

The World: The Greek word *cosmos* has several meanings, but in this context refers to a system in rebellion against God. It is external in nature. 1 John 2:15-17 indicates that temptations from the world attack us through the lust of the flesh (designed to trigger a physiological response), the lust of the eye (designed to manipulate our love of beauty), and the boastful pride of life (designed to promote selfish ambition). The biblical response to such attacks is found in verse 17: evaluate the solicitation and say yes to things that have eternal value, and no to options that have only temporary value and pleasure. Spending eternal treasure for temporary trash is a bad trade.

The Flesh: Warfare of the flesh can also trigger physiological responses within our body and mind. The source of this attack is internal, an active traitor still within each Christian (Rom. 7:15-25, Gal. 5:17). The biblical responses to attacks from the flesh are to flee (2 Tim. 2:22), renew our mind (Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 12:1-2), and to walk controlled by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

The Devil: Supernatural attack from the devil or his demons is usually mental (Acts 5:3; 2 Cor. 11:3), although it can be physical (Luke 13:10-11) and is represented in Scripture as flaming arrows (Eph. 6:16) or annoying to debilitating accusation (Rev. 12:10-11). These attacks can be external or internal. The biblical response to demonic attack is to resist, (James 4:7-10; 1 Pet. 5:8-10). Resistance from Christians against demonic attack can take the forms of offensive prayer or deliverance depending upon the nature of these attacks.