

# PUNCH FIRST

A 21-Day COMBAT Guide to Playing Spiritual Offense

BETH GUCKENBERGER

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DAVID  COOK™

*transforming lives together*

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Details in some stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

Bible credits are listed in the back of the book.

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**To Back2Back staff and all those who stand in the way of an  
enemy hell-bent on the destruction of vulnerable children.**

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of  
wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

MATTHEW 10:16 (ESV)



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# INTRO

Welcome, I'm glad you're here! What you are holding is my attempt to write what author Anne Lamott once described as something I "would be delighted to stumble upon." Part encouraging, part challenging, it is designed for you to do on your own or with a small group. Personally, I experienced radical spiritual growth when I dove into these topics with a few close friends. I found myself:

- Released from some habitual sinful thought patterns
- Equipped to become spiritually assertive
- Educated on the "fuzzy details" of spiritual warfare
- Empowered to fight like a warrior and not wait like a victim

The purpose of this book is to understand spiritual battle and equip you to confront the Enemy. To do this, I will outline the tactics of our enemy, but know that Day 13 is where we get into the fierce personal battle of COMBAT.

My hope is you will look forward to the next few weeks when we ask hard questions of ourselves, each other, and God, while simultaneously being encouraged and challenged to proactively fight against the Devil.

This journal was written to interact with the content in the *Throw the First Punch* book, so it will be a richer experience if you have already read it. It's full of personal stories and biblical teaching on this topic. However, within this journal we'll process through those same principles (just not as in-depth), and you will still engage effectively without that foundation. You'll find the journal broken into four sections:



Days 1–5: We’ll recap the ideas covered in *Throw the First Punch*.

Days 6–12: We’ll review the many tactics our enemy uses to try to destroy us.

Days 13–18: We’ll unpack the acronym COMBAT and practice using it in battle.

Days 19–21: Finally, we’ll set out to do the work of fighting in a spiritually aggressive stance.

COMBAT is the battle plan you’re looking for that can be applied in every area of your life. The first time through this journal, you will learn the process. When subsequent battles arise (and there will always be another battle ...), you can work through COMBAT on your own using the blank COMBAT plans provided (see the appendix). My prayer is that you will feel empowered to fight, rest, share, be vulnerable, and take risks. This is the rhythm of a kingdom warrior.



Before we begin, let’s pause for a personal assessment. This is a place for you to record your current understanding of and feelings about spiritual warfare and a spiritual enemy. We’ll check back after you complete the 21 days to see how your understanding grew.

✦ What do you believe about the Devil?

✦ How often do you think he tries to interfere in your life?

✦ What is your role in his defeat?

✦ What does a victorious life look like?

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# Recap

The following days offer interactive questions and exercises based on the stories and ideas from this journal's companion book, *Throw the First Punch*.





# DAY 1

## How This Works

### *A Tale of Two Storylines*

I was on a walk with my husband, Todd, and we were planning a getaway for just the two of us. Although the conversation started with the right intention, before long we were irritated with each other, disagreeing on where to go, how much to spend, how long to be away . . . We walked for a while in silence until Todd had the wisdom to ask, “**What do you think the Enemy wants to happen here?**”

Although in that moment I still wanted to win the argument, and I didn’t want to go anywhere with Todd, I knew he was asking the right question. Underneath all my big feelings and selfish thinking, the truth is I would rather work *with* Todd *against* an enemy who didn’t want us to connect, or rest, or dream than work *against* Todd *for* the Enemy.

We can partner with God to see regrowth and rebuilding, or our sin nature can partner with the Enemy, and without wanting it, we can propel forward the goals of the Devil. Paul wrote, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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” (Eph. 6:11–12).

In 1 Peter, we read about an enemy roaring around like a lion, wanting to devour us. I believe the lion is circling, and I want to take a stand. I am tired of the teaching that says to put on the armor and wait for the Devil to come to you. **What if we decided to go after *him* and punch him first?**

✦ Write out 1 John 3:8 here:

God has invited His people to partner with Him ever since Genesis. Sometimes that is building a kingdom of heaven here on earth, and sometimes it's collaborating with God to destroy the Devil's work. I don't have to sit around and be frustrated about the state of the world or the struggle I have with a particular sin. I am biblically encouraged to dismantle what the Devil is constructing around me. Since all work by God—restoration, reconciliation, redemption, rescue, and repair—is opposed by our spiritual enemy, I can imagine with stunning accuracy the Devil's agenda.



Instead of restoration, he wants destruction. Instead of reconciliation, he wants us to remain in conflict. Instead of redemption, he wants us to experience shame; instead of rescue, he wants us lost; and instead of repair, he wants us to feel permanently broken.

The Enemy will tell stories through our lives. When we don't put up a fight, and instead hand our sin nature over to him, he'll use it against us. There is much that factors into how we think, feel, and act—our past experiences, generational sin, spiritual discipline, temperament, accountability ... We can learn to see beyond what is unfolding around us and train for the spiritual combat we are invited to engage in.

When I was finishing as an interim lead pastor in a church, it was time to introduce the staff to my permanent replacement. I started a chapel with this question, “If you were the Enemy, what would you do over the next month to derail this ministry?”

The team immediately responded:

“Cast doubt over the new pastor’s intentions.”

“Create misunderstanding in meetings or over email.”

“Divide us over something seemingly small.”

“Craft competition or jealousy.”

I shared, “When you see any of these potential situations unfold, rightfully assign blame to the Enemy, who is biting on our insecurity or unconfessed sin (or someone else’s). Let’s confess any of our own wrong thinking and ask a blessing over whomever else is in the story.”

This was more than a situation where humans decided if their personalities would mix well with others. It was a spiritual battle with the Enemy’s goal of keeping God’s people critical of one another and distracted. We brainstormed ways to play spiritual offense, including initiating with the new leader and praying for his adjustment. We imagined a culture with short accounts, where everyone gave the benefit of the doubt and sin had no soil to flourish. The result was a community of hopeful sojourners, not perfect, but in motion, proactive, and healthy.

Let’s start this journey by thinking through the contrasting storylines we see at work in the world today. **In the following chart, list God’s storyline along with its enemy counterpart.**



GOD'S STORYLINE	ENEMY'S STORYLINE
Peace	Chaos
Gentleness	
Hope	
Sacrifice	Selfishness
	Fear
Reconciliation	
	Destruction
Grace	Condemnation
Love	Hate

I now walk into every situation asking myself these questions, *What would the Enemy want to happen here? What's his agenda?* so when I see (for example) fear, harshness, selfishness, or chaos unfold, I know to fight against Satan and not the people in the story. Punching first is owning a distinct strategy where I invite peace into fearful conversations, or purposing to be graceful when I sense harshness, or disciplining myself toward generosity

when I'd rather be selfish. We don't react when attacked, but instead move the spiritual momentum in the direction of kingdom advancement.



Todd and I are walking alongside a couple who is struggling in their marriage. Our own punch-first strategy is to make sure we are investing in each other, knowing if we aren't strong, we will be less likely to believe we have something to offer them. We have a child graduating from high school this year without a clear plan, and our punch-first strategy is to remind him of what we do know, so while the Father of Lies whispers to him, he has something to hold on to.

When I see every story and conversation as spiritual, I feel commissioned to spiritually fight. It's different from waking up and acting a certain way because of how I feel. I don't have to wonder if he wants to attack my self-image, family, marriage, friendships, and ministry. I know the Devil wants me spun around and confused. He wants me silent and ashamed. I don't want to wait for his attack while on defense. I want to offensively take ground from him. He does the same things over and over again; we can read about his tricks in Scripture and testify to his tactics in our own lives. We don't need to tiptoe around the Devil or hide from him. Knowing he's coming, we can learn to spot him from a mile away. How do we protect ourselves and those we love?

✦ Everything is spiritual, so what's a situation you are facing right now, and what do you imagine the Enemy really wants? How could you make a spiritually offensive move?

✧ Paraphrase Luke 10:19 below. What does it tell us about our spiritual power?

✧ What questions do you have about evil or enemy activity?

John 10:10 promises that God wants us to have a life “to the full.” It’s worth fighting for. The world God created is good, but it’s not always safe. Some of the not-perfect and unsafe experiences are a result of living in a fallen world. We get sick, people die, and it’s not fair. Some of the not-perfect and unsafe is because we sin or others sin, and the consequences are destruction, conflict, loss, and brokenness. Finally, some of the hard we experience is designed by our adversary, who is relentlessly on the attack.

Could we know this to be true and live a life where we advance spiritually, rather than just, at best, hold him back? What if we became so adept at offensive sword wielding that God would ask us to fight for others?

About a quarter of everything Jesus talked about in Scripture had to do with spiritual warfare. He knows how much it impacts our lives and is pleased when we willingly engage with Him in battle. The most powerful spiritual step I can take is to walk into every room and ask, *What would the Enemy want to happen here? What’s his agenda?*

*God, teach me to have eyes to see that what’s happening around me is spiritual. I want to come to You with my questions and to be led by You. Show me the spiritual power You designed for me to wield in Your name. I am Your child and student. Amen.*