This book is dedicated to my dear wife, Angela, who is my constant support and helpmate.
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Key Terms

animism. From Latin *animus*, meaning “soul, life.” The worldview that nonhuman entities (animals, plants, and inanimate objects or phenomena) possess a spiritual essence.

catechesis. The thorough and ongoing instruction in the basic teaching of Christian faith.

dogma. A principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.

generational curse. A curse that is thought to be passed down from one generation to the next.

moralism. The belief that access to God can be achieved through one’s personal efforts or attempts to improve oneself. Moralism, then, is nothing more than the worship of one’s works.

mysticism. A practice that seeks to connect one’s self to God through acts of contemplation and self-surrender.

naturalism. A philosophical viewpoint according to which everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.

necromancy. The attempt to communicate with the dead.

nihilism. The rejection of all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless.

paranormal. Something that is outside of normal experience or scientific explanation.

paranormal investigator. Someone who believes in numerous spiritual realities and seeks to prove their existence through pseudoscientific means.

Rationalism. The belief or theory that opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.

worldview. The lens by which someone organizes or structures the world.
I wish to thank my wife, Angela, who not only constantly encouraged me while writing this book but also worked tirelessly with me on its editing. I would also like to thank my children, Robert, Joseph, Amy, and Kate, without whose support this book could not have been accomplished. Finally, I give thanks and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has faithfully worked through the numerous individuals that have delivered the Holy Word and the Holy Sacraments to me, thereby connecting me to the forgiveness provided though His life, death, and resurrection. The most noteworthy of these is the sainted Rev. Dr. Ralph Fisher, who not only continually spoke the Gospel into my young ears but also instilled within me a strong desire for higher learning. To God be the praise.
Baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)

There are only two religions in the world. While such a statement may seem naive to the general reader, it should not sound strange to the Christian. For when the facade of this world is torn away, all that remains are two spiritual kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one—namely, Satan. The kingdom of God is founded on Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The kingdom of the devil is founded on a lie. His is a fallen and condemned kingdom without any hope of return to its splendor. Satan is the father of lies and is capable of becoming whatever we desire him to be. He represents himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) to those who will receive him as an angel; he represents himself as an ancestor to those who seek to speak to the dead; and he represents himself as a scientific principle to those who would deny God’s activity in the world. Yet, in the midst of his various appearances, the
strategy is always the same. It is a strategy of despair that curves an individual’s focus inward into oneself, to one’s works or abilities. Thus, all false religions are about the work of the individual, but the Christian religion is about the work of another: our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Afraid

The title of this book represents the general spiritual situation found in America, which also represents a common problem found worldwide. Outside the truth of Jesus’ sacrificial life and death for fallen humanity, only fear can exist. Only through the revelation of Jesus can anyone understand the nature of God. Apart from divine revelation, God remains a hidden God, who seems to be unjust and unloving. He seems to be a God who acts inconsistently throughout history. Throughout time, such an understanding of God has resulted in a spirituality called animism. Animism has many varieties, but one consistent theme or understanding is that there is a creator god who may have multiple names. This god is the one who created the cosmos and all that is contained within it—either acting on his own or in connection with a lesser god. This creator god is does not have a direct connection with the daily events of his creation. Does this sound familiar? It should, because animism has made a comeback in our time. One cannot turn on a television without hearing about ghosts, spirits, aliens from other planets, Bigfoot, or other strange creatures. Some may question if these things should be lumped together. Maybe you are one who does not believe in spirits or ghosts, but you do believe in Bigfoot or aliens. These last two seem more plausible to you because they do not carry with them spiritual connections. Yet, most people who believe in such things eventually find a spiritual connection with them. For instance, American Indians understand Sasquatch or Bigfoot to be a spiritual entity. Moreover, American Indian religions are becoming influential for many people who are seeking new spiritual experiences. The animistic worldview finds a spiritual reality, or essence, in many aspects of the world—seen and unseen—around them, whether plants, animals, objects, or “phenomena.”
Many of those who believe in otherworldly aliens also speak of them in spiritual ways. (We will examine this more in chapter 3.) This means that the Western world as a whole, and America in particular, is moving away from a scientific approach and returning to the realm of spirituality. Animism is now in the forefront of our daily lives. To be sure, it was never really gone, but for some time it has been hidden under the surface of our culture’s beliefs.¹

The Church has begun to talk about these things again, and many pastors are surprised by what their church members are confessing to them. Stories of spirits, night terrors, and ghosts come pouring out of people’s lips when they think it is safe to speak of such things. But this is a new experience for many pastors, and their lack of experience becomes problematic, especially when they give their people the impression that such things simply do not exist. Others show their unbelief by failing to address the topic of spiritual warfare. When texts referring to exorcism are included in the Gospel reading, but the topic of spiritual warfare is altogether avoided—or preached as if it was a historical event no longer to be expected in the modern day—this can cause those who are struggling with a spiritual or demonic problem to feel as though their church does not offer a safe place to speak openly about their struggles. They don’t expect their pastor to believe them. However, when a pastor preaches and teaches the exorcistic texts of the Bible as an ongoing reality for the Christian, things begin to change. Longtime members of the church begin to seek the counsel of their pastors.

This leads to the next problem: most pastors, and therefore the laypeople in their communities of faith, have not been trained to deal with the topic and issues of spiritual warfare. One of the purposes of this book is to provide guidance for responding to those who have various challenges and difficulties of a spiritual nature. Most of the personal stories contained within this book are the real-life stories of people who sought pastoral help.

However, due to the personal nature of these stories, some of the details have been changed to protect the privacy and pastoral seal of Confession and Absolution.

The Church’s Treasures for the Protection of the Christian

The real case studies that comprise this book demonstrate the power of Jesus’ name attached to the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. At times, the liturgical analysis will provide in-depth theological reflection on how both of these treasures of the Church become a bulwark of protection for the Christian who struggles under demonic and spiritual attack. Confession and Absolution, Holy Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper in the context of Christian life and spiritual warfare become critical topics for the mission of the Church.

Confession and Absolution

Many churches provide corporate Confession and Absolution in their weekly church services, but those who face severe spiritual oppression are often unable to find specific relief in this general form of Confession and Absolution. Satan is wise and knows how to create doubt in the sinner, especially in the sinner who is plagued with despair. Indeed, we will learn that despair is one of Satan’s strongest weapons, and many times it can only be wiped clean through the clear Word of God applied to the individual and his or her unique situation. Most spiritual and demonic problems can be alleviated through the simple act of individual Confession and Absolution.

Holy Baptism

The importance of Holy Baptism for one who is in spiritual danger cannot be overstated. Luther informs his readers that Holy Baptism brings with it an enemy who seeks to destroy us. The enemy is the devil, and Baptism brings us into his sights and toward the top of his list. One might then ask, “Why, then, would one seek to be baptized if it brings with it such danger?” But the danger is already present. The devil prowls relentlessly in our own weak and sinful flesh and in the sinful world. Even though each
of our circumstances will be different, the fact remains that all people will die, unless the Lord returns before the curse of death comes. Yet, Jesus has warned us: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4–5). Baptism is our protection, hope, and promise. In Baptism, we are connected to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The death that we face is no longer able to bring with it our eternal end. For the one who is baptized, life awaits—a much fuller life than anything experienced in this fallen world. Moreover, with Baptism comes ownership. The baptized become children of God and receive His divine name upon their foreheads. Yes, Baptism brings the rage of Satan and his demons, but it also provides the promise of protection and life.

Baptism has lifelong benefits—specifically, that we are God’s children and therefore cannot be separated from His protection or promises.

Holy Communion

While Jesus’ spiritual presence is promised wherever His Word is proclaimed, in His Holy Supper the Christian is connected to the bodily presence of Jesus. In the Sacrament, the child of God receives the true body and true blood of Jesus in and under the bread and the wine. It is this very body and blood given and shed upon the cross that defeated sin, death, and the devil. Holy Communion is the sustaining gift of Jesus’ presence for the forgiveness of sins.

Where Jesus Is, Satan Must Flee

Where these three gifts—Absolution, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion—exist, Satan cannot bear to remain. In the presence of Jesus, Satan is forced to flee. Satan’s release and surrender only come according to the Lord’s timetable. God chooses how and when to apply the promises of His holy things. This is important to understand so that when you struggle with the devil, yet fail to receive instant relief, you don’t fall into
greater despair. Scripture uses the apostle Paul as an example to those who struggle with this concept. Paul describes a demonic thorn in his flesh that God refused to remove despite Paul’s pleading. Although the Bible does not tell us why God did not remove this torment from the great apostle, the answer Paul receives makes it clear that God is mediating his torment. God tells Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

There is no hidden or secret truth waiting to be released to you in this book. Many Christians have been taught about the truths of these treasures of the Church from childhood, but they have simply not retained their meanings. Even those who have remembered these truths and have received great comfort from them still fall under the lies of Satan and need to hear, touch, and taste them daily as they battle their own sin, the world, and the devil.

**Catechesis as Protection**

During my research, it became clear that exorcism and spiritual warfare are more about catechesis than anything else. Catechesis is thorough and ongoing instruction in the basic teaching of Christian faith. In the Lutheran Church, catechetical instruction is comprised of studying the simple words of Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms and the promise of Jesus that they point to in Holy Scripture. It is important for one to continually hear and pray the words of Scripture. All of us need to be reminded that we are baptized and that Baptism has lifelong benefits—specifically, that we are God’s children and therefore cannot be separated from His protection or promises. All Christians need to be where the Lord has promised to be for the forgiveness of sins, and that promise is not found with any greater assurance than in the Lord’s Supper. Apart from these simple things, there is no hope, because Jesus has promised to personally be in these things for us.

It is the contention of this book that Jesus is the only exorcist, and He fulfills His work through the gifts that He has promised. For those readers
who do not come from a Christian sacramental background, these con-
cepts will seem foreign and maybe even ridiculous. If you find yourself in
this category, I simply ask you to continue reading and hold your doubts
until you see how the promised presence of Jesus is seen in the stories this
book contains.
The spirits the priest was invoking were not her ancestors but instead demons in the guise of human spirits.
CHAPTER 1

I AM AFRAID: ASKING THE DEVIL INTO YOUR HOME

Not earth nor hell’s satanic crew Against us shall prevail. Their might? A joke, a mere facade! God is with us and we with God—Our vict’ry cannot fail. (LSB 666:3)

We begin with the story of a woman who asked the spirits into her home. She was not ready for what would come, but who could be ready for such trouble? Stories like the one provided in this chapter are increasing in frequency in the Western world, because people are more open to the occult. The occult seeks to understand the things that have not been revealed to us by God. While God’s Word reveals many things that have been hidden from the foundation of the world (Matthew 13:35), sinful man always wants more. God’s revealed truth is never enough.
The occult attempts to learn the secret things that God has not revealed. In this endeavor, humanity seeks answers from what it believes to be means of divination or contact with otherworldly beings. As we will learn later in this book, the naturalism of our time is leading us back into the supernatural worldview. Now, more than ever, people from Western societies are reporting ghost sightings in their homes. They are concerned about terrifying generational curses. Reports about interactions with spiritual beings are growing in American society. Indeed, this is nothing new, but in the past such beliefs were only found on the fringes of our society. However, today more and more people are living in fear of those things that go bump in the night.

Who among us has not awakened in the night fearful of what may surround us? Even when we tell ourselves that we don’t believe in ghosts, we still remember that Satan and his demons can attack us in many ways. Many in this generation also falsely recognize that a proper veneration of the spirits sometimes provides them with material benefits. The spirits are willing to give us what we want in an attempt to redirect us from the proper focus of our dependence—namely, Jesus. Still, Satan and his demons often use fear to control people and lead them away to the deceptive spirit of the occult.

The true story you are about to read is one story among many common to our day. It demonstrates how one can be led astray from the truth and into the fear and despair that can result from seeking help from the occult. To many, the story may seem strange and unlikely, but similar stories can be found throughout American households. Many will question the prominence of such events in the American context. At one time, I, too, would have questioned such things, but I am contacted weekly by pastors who find themselves dealing with these new forms of “spirituality” springing up in their localities. Many times, even those who consider themselves to be Christians can be caught unaware of their fall into the false spirituality of our times.
Lost in the Spirituality of the Day

This story is about a young woman—a nurse—whom we will call Jill. She was unmarried and pregnant with her second child. Jill did not “come from money” and found herself struggling daily to succeed. She was a Christian, but her Christianity was formed by the preachers she followed daily on her television. Jill wondered, “What is wrong with me, and why haven’t I gained the success promised to me by the television evangelists?” If she is faithful, she was told, she will prosper, but Jill had not seen any change in her circumstances since becoming a Christian.

Without a church or a pastor, Jill turned to her friends for help. One friend told her that there was a man in Miami who had the power to help her. So she called the man, and he became her spiritual advisor and protector. Jill had unknowingly connected herself with a voodoo priest from “Little Haiti” in Miami. He claimed to have the power to change her life, but his services would come at a high cost. Jill thought the cost would be only monetary, but it would be much more.

Their first conversations took place over the phone. The priest prayed for her and sent her “the spirit of abundance.” He told Jill that this spirit would help her to finally find success in life. When his prayers didn’t seem to be helping, the voodoo priest told Jill that she had a generational curse. A generational curse is thought to be a curse that is passed down from one’s ancestors. While explanations of these curses may vary, it is usually claimed that they are the result of a previous relative’s particular vow made to the spirits, or a result of the vow of another person to harm the family. The curse is thought to be empowered by the spiritual world, which will only ease the curse if the one who carries it bends his or her will to that of the spirits. Whether such curses are real or hogwash, Satan and his demons take advantage of such mental doors to attack and bring despair upon their victims. The voodoo priest had Jill just where he wanted her. Without knowing it, Jill had opened herself up to the attack that was coming her way.
Upon diagnosing the problem as a generational curse, the priest told Jill that a solution would require a more personal touch. The phone calls they shared were not sufficient for such a desperate case as hers. Rather than just a simple blessing over the phone lines, he would need to come and visit her to properly remove the curse. Jill was ready to try anything, but she could never have imagined what the voodoo priest had in mind for her and her unborn child.

The arrangements were made for his visit. She would pay for his travel expenses and his services. This would not come cheap, but at this point Jill believed that whatever the cost, it would be worth it. What else could she do? She needed help, and she needed it now.

As Jill prepared to pick up the voodoo priest at the airport, she wondered what he would be like. She pictured him as her rescuer, one who would come and save her from the curse of her ancestors. Would he be young and powerful looking? She had never talked to him about such things on the phone, but Jill had expected him to be impressive.

When the voodoo priest finally emerged from the airport terminal, Jill was surprised at his age. He had sounded so young on the phone, but he had graying hair. He was well-dressed and had a striking look, making him seem to have a “hidden power” about him. The man immediately took control over the situation. He told Jill that they needed to gather the necessary supplies on the way to her home. Their first stop was the sporting goods store. As they entered the store, they walked to the very back, to the area where the firearms were sold. What did they need? The man spoke to the store clerk and was directed to one of the shelves. Gunpowder! The man explained that the ritual Jill would undergo required gunpowder. He would explain more when they got to her home.

As the two of them entered Jill’s house, the voodoo priest requested a few other items. He needed a piece of wood large enough for her to stand upon, pictures of Jill’s deceased ancestors, and a glass of water for each of the ancestors. It was time for the ritual to begin. He told Jill to stand on the wood and then poured out the gunpowder in a circle around her. On a
shelf, he placed the pictures of Jill’s ancestors with a glass of water in front of each picture. He explained, “The water is your offering to the ancestors. They have the power to help you or to hurt you. By offering this sacrifice, they will be inclined to help rather than hurt.” Next, the voodoo priest began calling on his spirits. To Jill, his words were unintelligible, but he was no doubt speaking in Haitian Creole. As he spoke the words of his incantation, he reached down, striking a match and igniting the gunpowder that encircled her. Dark smoke filled Jill’s nose as the voodoo priest continued to chant over her. Following the ritual, Jill was instructed to put the wooden board in a safe place within the home and to keep her children from ever touching it.

Next, the voodoo priest reached into his bag and removed a bar of dark black soap. Voodoo priests use black soap as one of the ingredients in what they call “African Money Spell.” The soap can cost as much as $250 per bar, but it promises to bring much money to the one who uses it properly in the bathing ritual. The priest instructed Jill to bathe with the soap on the morning of each full moon and recite the words provided to her. He told her that the curse laid upon her was a difficult one and that there was still even more that she must undergo to properly remove the curse.

The final ritual that Jill was required to undergo was the most disturbing. The voodoo priest asked Jill to expose her pregnant belly to him. After Jill removed her shirt, the man started rubbing a dark voodoo potion upon her belly. While his hands moved over the thin flesh covering the baby in her womb, the priest began to chant the voodoo spell upon her unborn child. Looking back on the event, Jill admitted that she was disgusted with herself for allowing this stranger such access to her child. The man told her that the ritual was necessary to protect the child from the spirits. He explained to the mother-to-be that when he cast the spirits from her, they would seek to enter the closest person to her, in this case the child within her womb. Jill was placing herself and her child directly into the hands of a false prophet. The spirits the priest was invoking were not her ancestors but instead demons in the guise of human spirits.
With this last ritual completed, the voodoo priest required his price. Jill did not reveal the amount of money she was required to pay the priest, but she was clear that it was a substantial amount, more than she could pay at the time. After some negotiations, Jill and the voodoo priest agreed on the terms of his payment. Knowing that she might decide to hold back his payment after his departure, the voodoo priest warned Jill about the consequences she would face if she did not repay her debt to him. Jill remembers him saying, “If you fail to pay even one payment, the spirits will return with even more terrifying spirits to destroy your life and the lives of your children.”

The man whom Jill had hoped would reassure her that morning now overwhelmed her with fear and disgust. She held back her disdain as she drove him to the airport. For the first few months, Jill sent him the payments as they had agreed. In those months, Jill did not notice any improvement in her condition. In fact, she was even more afraid than she had been in the past. After some time had passed, she finally decided to reach out to a Christian pastor for help. Jill was embarrassed by her actions, but she knew she needed help. The pastor admitted that he had never heard of such things, but he suggested that she should break all contact with the man. After some thought, Jill decided that she would follow the pastor’s advice. The voodoo priest was furious that she had not sent her required payments and threatened her with what was soon to come her way. The spirits would be back but this time with a vengeance.

From Where Does My Help Come?

From the time Jill cut off her connection to the voodoo priest she was under constant spiritual attack. Jill saw visions of dead relatives, dark shadow people, and a few times she was even physically attacked. Moreover, her youngest child, the one who had undergone the voodoo ritual while
still in his mother’s womb, also experienced similar visions and terrifying
nightmares. Jill needed help, and she needed it right away.

Jill rarely attended church, but she happened to work with a chaplain
from the Lutheran Church. One day, in passing, she asked the chaplain if
he had any experience with the things she was continuing to face. He had
done a number of house blessings (another name for a home exorcism)
and told her he would come to her home and pray with her.

Within a few days, the pastor met Jill at her home. He spoke to her
about Jesus and His protection for those who trusted in Him. The home
was a small but well-kept two bedroom duplex. The pastor went from room
to room speaking the words of dedication and exorcism. He concluded the
dedication by singing the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” At first,
things seemed to improve, but the strange occurrences did not completely
go away. The pastor told Jill that Jesus is the one who protects His people
and that she should continue the prayers in her home. He also told her that
he would return if she thought she needed him. It was not long before she
made another request for him to visit. This time, the pastor sought the help
of another pastor who had more experience with the demonic. The date
was set: the two pastors would visit and speak the words of Jesus upon Jill
and her home.

As the pastors entered Jill’s home, they were warmly greeted. The lights
were turned low in the house and the television was on as they sat down to
talk. The pastors listened as Jill told them her story, then they proceeded to
perform another house blessing.

How does one go about doing a home blessing? To put the answer into
its proper context, one must first consider the amount of time the pastors
spent at the house. In this case, it was about two and a half hours. While
the exorcism only took about twenty minutes, it was necessary before the
exorcism to learn more about Jill and her experiences. She was in need
of pastoral assistance. Jill first needed to learn who she was in Jesus if she
was going to be able to deal with the spirits that were causing her harm.
Although she had been baptized as a young girl, she had never been taught
the significance of her Baptism. Jill needed catechizing; she needed to be taught the Christian faith, specifically what her Baptism meant and the promises it contains.

What do Christians need to know as they face the author of sin—the devil—and his demons? Dr. Martin Luther provides some of the most helpful advice for all Christians:

Lo, when I believe this with my whole heart, then I have the greatest treasure, namely, the death of Christ and the power which it has wrought, and I am more concerned with that than with what I have done. Therefore, devil, begone with both my righteousness and my sin. If I have committed some sin, go eat the dung; it’s yours. I’m not worrying about it, for Jesus Christ died. St. Paul bids me comfort myself with this, that I may learn to defend myself from the devil and say: Even though I have sinned, it doesn’t matter; I will not argue with you about what evil or good I have done. There is no time to talk of that now; go away and do it some other time when I have been a bad boy, or go to the impenitent and scare them all you please. But with me, who have already been through the anguish and throes of death, you’ll find no place now. This is not the time for arguing, but for comforting myself with the words that Jesus Christ died and rose for me. Thus I am sure that God will bring me, along with other Christians, with Christ to his right hand and carry me through death and hell.\(^2\)

While Luther’s words may seem a bit crude to some, they are blunt and to the point. Luther knew that the prideful devil could not bear to be belittled nor to have his pride attacked. Luther’s response would make for good memory work for all Christians. Our righteousness is never found in our works or actions, for such will always be tainted with the sin that clings to us. No, our righteousness is found only in Jesus, who died and carried our sins to a cross. Nothing is left to do. Even repentance is a gift of God to

\(^2\) AE 51:241–42.
His baptized children (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 5:31–32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:25; Hebrews 6:1). This was the lesson Jill needed to learn.

Jill had not properly understood the Gospel. She needed to understand who she was in Christ Jesus. In talking with Jill, it became clear to the pastors that her conscience was plagued with the sins she had committed against God. Jill thought herself to be lost and without hope because she had brought the voodoo priest into her family’s life. She believed that she was under a generational curse, and as a result of that curse neither she nor her children would ever prosper. This lie was perpetuated through the false claims of the “prosperity gospel,” which had added to her despair.

The devil is a liar and his followers continue in his ways. Jill had committed many serious sins by attaching herself to the voodoo priest and ultimately to Satan, whom he served. Because of the lie she was holding on to, Jill was trapped in a life of despair. She did not understand the promise of Jesus’ Gospel for her. She needed to hear the gracious, life-giving Gospel that had claimed her as a child of God when she was baptized into His name, with all the promises of forgiveness, life, and the resurrection. What of her sins? Once again, Luther’s response is the right response whenever we are attacked by Satan and his demons’ condemning words: “Even though I have sinned, it doesn’t matter; I will not argue with you about what evil or good I have done. There is no time to talk of that now; go away.”3 Luther speaks in the realm of exorcism. The word exorcism simply means “depart,” or as Luther put it, “go away.” Depart in the name of Jesus! Christ Jesus died for my sin, and there is nothing left for you, devil, to claim against me. These are words of absolution. When sins are absolved, the doubt and despair attached to them are cast off. The accusations of the devil are put to rest, and he is cast away. In this sense, I maintain that Absolution is a form of exorcism.

Jill, who had experienced such terror in her home, had asked the pastors to exorcise her house. But what she really needed was to confess her sins and hear the forgiveness that comes in Absolution. That is where

3 AE 51:241.
the pastors began. Jill confessed her unfaithfulness, which included her problematic background and a host of other sins that tormented her. The response Jill heard was strong and to the point: “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Confession and Absolution is lost to many in the Christian Church today. Roman Catholics continue a form of private Confession and Absolution, but the practice, called penance, has some shortcomings. Only the specific sins that are confessed receive the absolution and then only when the required penance (a requirement assigned by the priest) is completed. Such a system can leave doubt in the sinner’s mind as to the validity of the absolution. The question arises, “Did I do everything that was required of me to complete the process?” “What sins did I hold back or forget to confess before the priest?” “Did I properly complete my required penance?” Satan is always working through our doubts. He will exploit any weakness.

For those who adhere to American Evangelicalism or the Reformed tradition, confession and absolution is something that takes place between the sinner and God. In this form, the confession is not heard by another person; therefore, in turn, the person offering the confession does not hear any words of absolution. He or she may read the promises from the Gospel (1 John 1:9), which are true promises, but Satan and his demons are masters at causing people to question if such forgiveness can cover the sins they have committed.

The Lutheran form of confession is distinctly different from the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical or Reformed practices of confession and absolution. For Lutherans, the purpose of confession is to hear absolution. The repentant person confesses his sin (specific or general) to a pastor and then hears that his sins are forgiven from the pastor (John 20:21–23)—the one who is a called representative of God. The Lutheran Rite of Confession
and Absolution empties the devil’s arsenal of tricks by taking all of the requirements of Absolution away from the person hearing the Words of Absolution and placing them into the hands of the Savior. “You are forgiven; go in peace.” This is the absolution that Jill needed to hear. It is an absolution we all need to hear, on a continuous basis, if we are to overcome the fiery arrows of the devil and his demons (Ephesians 6:16).

Following her confession and absolution, Jill had many questions about the things she had experienced. What about angels? Jill had reported seeing them. What about ghosts? She had reported seeing them also. What about curses? Jill had thought herself to be under one. These and many other questions were asked and answered. If you have similar questions, you will find the answers as you continue to read through the stories in this book. Most important, you need to recognize what Jill needed to recognize—specifically, that Satan and his demons cannot be trusted. Their arguments and accusations seem indisputable, but hidden behind the “truth” of their words are only lies (John 8:44).

Jill had been constantly terrorized in her home. Yet, she was a child of God who had received the promise of Jesus in her Baptism, that He would never leave her nor forsake her. Jesus’ words are clear, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus had promised to be with Jill on the day of her Baptism, but she had not understood this truth. All that Jill could think about was the terror found in her home and the curse that she believed she and her children carried.

What were the terrors that Jill had been undergoing? She had on numerous occasions noticed a dark shadowy figure lurking around her house. Flames had come out of nowhere from the stove top to burn her hands. The voodoo priest had constantly tormented her in her dreams. He would stand before her each night and remind her that he would continue to torment her for not paying her debt. Things in the house would move around on their own. Moreover, she would find white chicken feathers (chicken sacrifices are common in voodoo rituals) throughout her home, but she had no feathers or down pillows. These and many other things had
caused her difficulty for more than ten years. Moreover, Jill’s child, who had been part of the voodoo ritual while still in the womb, continued to have nightmares depicting his mother as a monster who was trying to kill him. He would get up at night and see Jill sitting in the front room of the house with dirty clothing and a horrible look upon her face. But when he would return to his room, he would see his mother fast asleep in her bed.

Such stories seem too fanciful for modern thinkers to comprehend. The “enlightened world” has no room for the supernatural, but spirituality is returning, and such beliefs are becoming more common in our society. Still, for the Christian, such beliefs are not fanciful. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). If the Christian were to deny the works of the devil, they would be denying Scripture. The apostle Peter is clear: the devil continually seeks to cause harm to God’s creation (1 Peter 5:8). Moreover, St. Paul reminds us that even after Jesus’ crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension, we continue to live in a spiritual battlefield (Ephesians 6:12). For Jill, the battlefield had entered her home.

Prayer is an important aspect of the Christian life, and although Jill knew that she needed to pray, she had the wrong understanding of prayer. She had viewed prayer as an incantation. She was not praying to her Lord, who could deliver her from the spirits that tormented her. Instead, she had been directing her prayers to the spirits. Jill viewed prayer as magic. If she was fearful or had any paranormal experiences, she would begin praying the Lord’s Prayer. She did so thinking that it was her action of reciting the prayer that would bring her comfort and protection, but prayer is not to be used as a charm, spell, or talisman. Christian prayer seeks help from Jesus. Prayer is a conversation with God, who has promised to be with us and never forsake us.

Prayer that is used as an incantation becomes idolatry and is against the First Commandment, which prohibits us from having other gods. What does it mean to have other gods? Luther is helpful here as well:

You shall have Me alone as your God. What is the meaning of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to
have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. (LC I 1–3)

Even prayer can become a false god when we use it in any way not intended by God. When people use prayer as a charm, spell, talisman, or an incantation, they are attempting to use it to make something magical happen. Such is the way that the animistic peoples of the traditional religions would treat prayer. Instead, prayer is meant to be used as a conversation with the One who has all power to do all things—namely, Christ Jesus.

If you are struggling with this concept, it could be that you, too, have been using prayer as more of a false idol rather than the way true prayer is offered. Many times, things that appear to be “Christian” in effect are not. Many of the prayers and rituals of the various false religions, including voodoo, can appear to be Christian, but in fact they seek to manipulate either God or the lesser spirits, which is idolatry. In Jill’s case, she recognized that she was not seeking the protection of Jesus but was speaking the words of her “prayer” to defend against the evil that was attacking her.

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**Many times, things that appear to be “Christian” in effect are not.**

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Finally, after over two hours of conversation, the pastors began the blessing of the home (an exorcism of place). They started the ritual with a hymn from the *Lutheran Service Book*, “O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe” (*LSB* 666). This hymn mocks Satan as a defeated foe before Jesus: “Not earth nor hell’s satanic crew Against us shall prevail. Their might? A joke, a mere facade!” (st. 3).

The placement of this hymn in the *Lutheran Service Book* as hymn number 666 was not accidental. It is perfectly placed within the hymnal and easily found by anyone who seeks it. Yet, it is not alone in the hymnal.
The *Lutheran Service Book* has more than seventy hymns that are exorcistic in nature. By calling these hymns “exorcistic,” I mean that they directly oppose Satan and/or his evil angels. You will find a list of these helpful exorcistic hymns in the appendix at the back of the book.

Any of the hymns listed in the table could have been chosen as a way to begin the house blessing, but the hymn “O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe” spoke specifically to Jill’s spiritual condition of fear. After they sang this hymn, one of the pastors explained its meaning to Jill stanza by stanza. A short summary is provided:

Stanza 1: O little flock, fear not the foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow;
   Dread not his rage and pow’r.
And though your courage sometimes faints,
   His seeming triumph o’er God’s saints
   Lasts but a little hour.

The devil is a powerful foe in comparison to we who are fallen human beings. This stanza recognizes that the devil is real and that he seeks to overthrow our faith and hope in Jesus and cast us into despair. In this stanza, we recognize that our “courage sometimes faints.” Looking in from the outside, it appears that Satan is winning this battle both within us and in the world in which we live. These words directly described Jill as she was being terrified by Satan’s demons nightly in her home. With the recognition of Satan’s power and might, the stanza prepares its readers for the comfort that comes in Jesus.

Stanza 2: Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs;
   Leave it to Him, our Lord.
Though hidden yet from mortal eyes,
   His Gideon shall for you arise,
   Uphold you and His Word.

In spite of the recognition of the powerful adversary who is seeking to destroy us, God’s saints, we can be of good cheer. Jesus has the power to
avenge the evil done to us. While we are many times incapable of seeing
the spiritual battle that is taking place around us, this stanza assures us that
even if these things are hidden from our eyes, God has provided His holy
angels to fight on our behalf.

**God has provided His holy angels to fight on our behalf.**

By this time, Jill had recognized that she was powerless against the
spirits who were molesting her. Even if Jill could not see them, God’s holy
angels were there protecting her. These words brought great comfort to
her. After all the years of trying to face these spirits on her own, Jill finally
recognized that she was powerless on her own. But she wasn’t on her own:
now she knew that God was with her.

Stanza 3 reaffirms that these promises are true and that for the children
of God only victory awaits.

Stanza 3: As true as God’s own Word is true,
Not earth nor hell’s satanic crew
    Against us shall prevail.
Their might? A joke, a mere facade!
God is with us and we with God—
    Our vict’ry cannot fail.

God’s Word is true! While stanza 1 recognizes that Satan is a powerful
foe seeking to overthrow us, this stanza speaks of Satan and his demons as
they stand before the stronger man, Jesus. A reminder from the Epistle to
the Colossians will serve to be helpful at this point:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all
creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and
on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him
and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things
hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He
is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in every-
thing He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:15–20)

Satan and his demons are created beings. Jesus is the creator of all things, and in Him everything and everyone finds their origin. Creation can only continue because Jesus holds it together. Satan is weak and feeble in contrast to Jesus. John’s Gospel reminds us that Jesus removed Satan from his throne through His crucifixion. John records Jesus’ words, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:31–32). The phrase “cast out” comes from the Greek word ek-ballō, which is translated into English as “exorcize.” Jesus’ crucifixion is the deciding act that exorcizes Satan from his position of power, thereby rendering Satan and his demons powerless. The power Satan wields is “a joke, a mere facade!” The act of the crucifixion has insured that our “vict’ry cannot fail.”

Stanza 4: Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer;
Great Captain, now Thine arm make bare,
    Fight for us once again!
So shall Thy saints and martyrs raise
A mighty chorus to Thy praise
    Forevermore. Amen.

Here, we see the object of our prayers: Jesus. He is the “Great Captain,” and our prayer to Him is that He would “fight for us once again!” Jill no longer needed to fight a battle against the spirits within her home. Jesus would be the focus of her prayers as she took her place next to the mighty chorus of all of those who had gone before her in faith toward the victory that is ensured through Jesus.

4 For more on this, see Robert H. Bennett, I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare: True Accounts from the Lutheran Church of Madagascar (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 101–4, 126–28.
Jill broke out in a smile. She said, “It all makes sense now. Jesus is with me, so I don’t have to be afraid.” The promise of Jesus had turned Jill’s fear into strength. Like so many others whom you will read about in the coming chapters, Jill had been living in fear. But the promise of Jesus brings freedom from fear. After Confession and Absolution and catechesis, Jill was ready for the exorcism of her home to continue.

The pastors began in the bedroom, proceeded from room to room, and completed the exorcism in the living room. In each room, they read a number of Scripture passages and commanded Satan and his demons to depart in the name of Jesus. One need not use prescribed scriptural passages, but in this case they read John 14:12–17; Mark 16:15–20; Matthew 18:18–20; John 20:21–23; and concluded with John 12:31–37. The significance of each of these texts will be described later in this book.

Beggars before a Faithful God

After reading the various texts and preaching a short sermon on each one, the exorcism concluded with “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” another exorcistic hymn found in the Lutheran Service Book (656 and 657):

A mighty fortress is our God,
   A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev’ry need
   That hath us now o’ertaken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
   Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done,
   Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One,
   Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,  
Of Sabaoth Lord,  
And there’s none other God;  
He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill,  
All eager to devour us,  
We tremble not, we fear no ill;  
They shall not overpow’r us.  
This world’s prince may still  
Scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none.  
He’s judged; the deed is done;  
One little word can fell him.

The Word they still shall let remain  
Nor any thanks have for it;  
He's by our side upon the plain  
With His good gifts and Spirit.  
And take they our life,  
Goods, fame, child, and wife,  
Though these all be gone,  
Our vict’ry has been won;  
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

The themes from the hymns “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and “O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe” are similar. Here, once again, Christians are reminded that they have no power when faced with the evil of Satan and his demons. While this is true, the hymn points to One who is a “mighty fortress” protecting us from the “deadly foe,” who seeks to bring us to “deadly woe.” Who can stand against Satan and his power? No one in this world has even a chance because “on earth is not his equal.” In fact, “With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected.” Too often people forget this warning. The danger of terror, despair, and even the possibility of suicide follow from failing to recognize this warning. As
a result of the fall into sin, we are damaged goods. While the focus of this book puts a heavy emphasis on the activities of the devil and his demons, it is necessary to recognize that the spiritual battle we face is only enhanced by the devil's activities.

Luther reminds us in the explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer that due to original sin, everyone faces a three-front battle. Our battle is against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. This means that not all temptations are due to the devil directly, but the world and the flesh mediate most temptations. Satan is always the original source of these temptations but not the immediate source. As a result, we have no hope in fighting a spiritual battle on our own. Yet, people continue to seek spirituality apart from the Church. The Church is the place where Jesus has promised to be for our protection, forgiveness, and life. It is to Jesus that the hymn now turns, “But for us fights the valiant One . . . Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God; He holds the field forever.” Jesus is the only hope for a fallen world that seeks to destroy itself. Moreover, he is the Lord of Sabaoth. The word Sabaoth means “armies”—that is, the heavenly host, the holy warrior angels of heaven. In Scripture, we learn that one-third of the angels followed Satan in his rebellion (Revelation 12:3–9). Moreover, Scripture is clear that the evil angels no longer carry the power of God. The only strength the fallen angels continue to possess is that which they received at creation. While the thought of such powerful beings is sure to cause anyone fear, it should not. Scripture is also clear that holy angels who remained faithful to God (two-thirds of an unnumbered army [Hebrews 12:22]), retain the power to act in God’s stead. They do so at the command of Jesus, who “holds the field forever.” Therefore, when we are in Jesus, the devil and his followers have no power over us. The words of the hymn are clear: Satan and his evil angels are judged in Jesus’ crucifixion. The devil “can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.” While many have provided possible answers as to the “one word” that can stop the devil, the only proper answer is Jesus. He is the One who holds all things together and provides for all that we have in this life and the next (Colossians 1:15–20).
It is true that we must continue to live in this world of pain, but the final stanza of Luther’s hymn brings our situation into perspective. There is nothing that can be taken away from us that is not a gift from God. The devil and the world can seek to destroy all that we have, “our life, goods, fame, child, and wife,” but just as God has provided them for us, He is the same One who can replace them in the new creation.

Therefore, “Though these all be gone, Our vict’ry has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.” This is the victory that belonged to Jill, who had sat in terror for more than ten years. Could Jill be freed from the attacks of Satan and his evil angels? No, none of us still living have received that promise, as we still contend against the “old evil foe.” But we are promised that we are connected to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection through the gift of Baptism (Romans 6:4–11). Death has been defeated, and we have the victory in Jesus. In the end, this is the only thing that matters, and it is the only promise that can sustain us in our final hours of life. When death draws near, Satan is sure to come calling. Luther reminds us that we are all only beggars, but we have a faithful God who will not fail us. These are the things Jill learned that day. She learned the significance of this hymn before she and the pastors sang it together. As Jill sang, her voice was strong. She sang with the promise of victory in her Lord Jesus Christ.

What will happen to Jill? Will these spirits leave her in peace? Maybe, maybe not, but she is in peace no matter what the spirits do in the end. She is connected to Jesus, who is her only true peace, “A trusty shield and weapon.” As you proceed through this book, you will see that Jill’s story is not as exclusive as you may have thought.
Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. How does Confession and Absolution come into play in the midst of spiritual warfare? Explain your answer using examples from the chapter.

2. What role can proper catechesis play in the midst of spiritual warfare? Explain your answer using examples from the chapter.

3. What example does Martin Luther provide when dealing with demonic assault?

4. What does “prosperity preaching” teach? How did the prosperity preaching that Jill encountered help lead her into the spiritual darkness she endured?

5. Describe Jill’s view of prayer. How could this view of prayer be problematic?

6. How can the promise of Holy Baptism help us with the spiritual battles we face?

7. How can Christian hymns provide assistance to those who are spiritually oppressed or possessed?

8. Review the list of hymns provided in the appendix. How can these hymns be described as exorcistic in nature?

9. Are you aware of any exorcistic hymns that are not included in the appendix but that might be helpful to one who is spiritually oppressed or possessed? If so, what are they, and where can they be found?

10. Describe the problems of attempting to engage in a spiritual battle by oneself.