

THE UNSEEN WAR

A COMPANION DISCUSSION GUIDE TO THE NOVEL
DARK INTERCEPT AND THE SHEPHERDS SERIES
BY ANDREWS & WILSON



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Introduction

In the faith-based novel *Dark Intercept*, the first book in a new Christian thriller series titled the Shepherds, authors Andrews & Wilson entertain us with an exciting, action-packed story. But they also make us think about what we truly believe about spiritual warfare and the Christian's response to crisis. Challenging us to discuss and grow in our belief is the core of church and faith-venue groups, and this novel is chock-full of great conversation starters. Ideally, a group wishing to use this book to begin that conversation would make it available to the group several weeks in advance and encourage the members to read the story in its entirety before kicking off the discussion. The themes discussed here are woven throughout *Dark Intercept*, and reading the story before diving in will make the discussion more fruitful.

This guide is meant as a starting point for leading a group in this discussion, but as is always the case, the group will find its own direction, and the leader should not limit the discussion to the questions here nor feel obligated to complete them all. Instead, pray from the beginning that God will lead the group, through the Holy Spirit, to uncover what He has for them.

I feel that the discussion of spiritual warfare will be most effective when shared over several group meetings of an hour. This guide contains five parts, and they can be used all at once in a long meeting, spread over several weeks, or cherry-picked to match with the group's needs. Again, use this as a starting point.

Dark Intercept is a fictional book, but the battles we engage in are not fictional. After diving even a few pages into the novel, our hope is that you'll desire to know more about the spiritual battlefield we live in. Through God's Word and through some conversations over cups of coffee, this fictional series just might make you hunger for more understanding of the battle going on around you and your family so you can be personally prepared for this war.

May God bless you and your ministry!

Part 1

The Armor of God

The characters in *Dark Intercept*, especially the Shepherds encountered later in the book by Jedidiah Johnson, seem well versed in the idea of equipping themselves with the armor of God. Even early on, Jed seems to almost instinctively apply the lessons of warfare he learned as a Navy SEAL to the world of spiritual warfare, arming himself for battle in both the physical and spiritual realms and growing in his understanding of this as story unfolds. The Bible writes about putting on “the whole armor of God” in Ephesians 6:10-18 (see below for the full text). The implication clearly relates to the spiritual realm of warfare between good and evil, God and Satan, but what is this warfare and is it real? What does the Bible say about our enemy? Can we really be in a battle between good and evil on a spiritual plane? And how do we engage in this battle? Who fights our battle?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 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. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

Ephesians 6:10-18

The mere mention of armor can’t help but make us imagine a soldier standing ready, like our Navy SEAL Jedidiah Johnson in the early chapters of *Dark Intercept*. These Scriptures clearly state that we are in a battle, and whether we choose to engage in this combat or not, the war is going on around us. When Scripture encourages us to daily put on the armor of God, it is saying something about the world we live and breathe in.

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:17

This Scripture speaks to the world system we live in and the losing battle that system is

engaged in. As Christians, we are loosely attached to this system which will pass away. We live for something far better than what this world can offer. This answers the “why” behind spiritual warfare: it is a battle over you and me. Which army are you enlisted in—the army of God or the army of this world, led by Satan? Even as believers, we stand in enemy territory, which minimally requires us to put on protective gear. Like a scuba diver who can’t survive in water without special gear, we too need to put on gear and take care as we live in a world (system) where we don’t belong.

Conversation Starters

1. The Bible speaks clearly about the conflict between good and evil that we call “spiritual warfare.” How does a war that is being fought spiritually affect us physically? Can you recall a time in your life when you knew you were in a battle? How did that battle play out in the physical realm? Even though we know the war will be won in the end, does every spiritual battle end in victory? Are there war wounds and casualties?
2. Like a scuba diver needs special gear to survive and enjoy the water, how does wearing the armor of God help us to survive and even enjoy the world we live in?
3. Discuss how leaving a critical piece of scuba gear off could have an effect on your life and the enjoyment you had hoped for when you dove into the water. How might that analogy apply to the armor of God and the world we walk into daily?
4. The Bible speaks briefly about Satan in comparison to God. Why is this? Should we be careful in our studies not to magnify Satan’s power, but rather the power of God? Why?

Part 2

Real and Present Danger

In worldly warfare, the hope is that the enemy can be easily identified and the threat evaluated so a plan to defeat it can be developed. For Jed Johnson in *Dark Intercept*, seventeen years of combat operations against a worldly enemy bent on destruction of his country and values is overt, obvious, and definable. He spent years honing his combat skills to defeat this enemy, with great success. But as the story unfolds, Jed learns there is another enemy, perhaps even behind the enemy he's spent his adult life against in life-and-death battles. Like us, perhaps, he is shocked to find that spiritual forces may well be behind his worldly battles.

Let's look again at Ephesians 6:11-12:

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.

This enemy, these "powers of this dark world" and "spiritual forces of evil," are what Jed must now learn to fight. It is also the very real enemy that we, as Christians, must be prepared to engage and defeat. Is this enemy real? The Bible tells us, "Absolutely!"

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Satan (also called the devil and the Accuser) is a real danger and has been around man since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. The devil uses real weapons against us: he baits us with false teachings, he lures us into sin, and he tries to turn us against each other. His purpose is to keep us from relationship with God through Jesus Christ and therefore from living out God's main purpose for our lives, which is to be a witness for Christ. As the verse above says, he wants to devour us so we can no longer be a light to a lost world.

Every person who enlists in the military expects that they could face an enemy. They stand by awaiting orders to go and deliver freedom to those oppressed or being held captive by the enemy. Our purpose is to walk into the enemy's camp and free those who are being held captive by sharing the truth of Jesus to as many as we come in contact with. That is seeking and saving the lost. That is our mission, and our enemy in that mission is real. Failure to understand that means risking failure in the mission before us, because any combat soldier will tell you that you can't defeat an enemy you neither see nor understand.

Conversation Starters

1. In a passage known as the great commission, Jesus told His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Throughout his career as a SEAL, Jed operated under orders and completed his given mission. In light of this, how do we see this order given to us by Jesus? Is it simply a good idea or a directive? Discuss how someone under the authority to be given orders carries them out—then apply that same discussion to the great commission.
2. Jed’s orders prepared him for battle. He received special training to prepare him for any scenario he could encounter along the mission. How can a “Christian soldier” practice and prepare for our mission? Special operations soldiers often have go bags so they can be ready to go at a moment’s notice—what does our spiritual “go bag” look like?
3. As a Navy SEAL, Jed had to both find and understand his enemies to defeat them. How has this discussion and the themes of this book helped you understand the threat we face from Satan so you are better prepared to combat him?

Part 3

Made to Be Strong

In *Dark Intercept*, we see in Jedidiah Johnson a man who finds his courage naturally, from bravery and confidence forged on the battlefield in the war on terror. But not all of us have seventeen years of combat experience as a Navy SEAL to lean on. Where do we go to find such strength? Because, if we are indeed in a battle with evil and are called to be combatants in that struggle, we will need that strength. After all, in 1 Peter 5:8 we learned, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” If our enemy is ready to devour us, we will need both strength and courage. But we are made by God to be strong!

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Ephesians 6:10

This is a strength that doesn't come from us but from God. We can see an illustration of this in the story of David. A shepherd boy stands up to a giant with a few stones and a slingshot. Looking at this battle, it's easy to see that something bigger than David not only took down a giant, but also defeated the army standing against his people.

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.

1 Samuel 17:47

This shepherd boy knew that this battle was not his but belonged to the Lord. Yet ironically, when David became king, he asked for a head count of his army (see 1 Chronicles 21:1-5). This time, David set out to fight a battle in his own strength. This is when our enemy the devil delights—when he realizes that we are entering into a battle with our own might and strength.

In *Dark Intercept*, our hero, Jed, single-handedly storms the enemy compound to save Sarah Beth. It's clear that he is not without fear, but he draws on an inner strength to tackle the task at hand. By this point in the story, he is just beginning to re-engage his faith, and even this fledgling belief gives him more strength and confidence that God is, in fact, with him. And in the character of Sarah Beth, we see powerful, childlike faith that gives her strength even more impressive than her Navy SEAL rescuer's!

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

We don't need to fear the enemy—but we must absolutely realize that no self-help strategy will defeat him. Submitting to God is what makes us strong. When He is strong in us, then the

devil will be defeated. Sarah Beth is only twelve years old in the story, but she seems to naturally embrace this idea, and look at the result!

Conversation Starters

1. Discuss what it means to be strong in the Lord. Can you think of ways we might, like King David, lean on our own strength or self-help strategies instead of God's help?
2. One of Satan's strategies is to convince us to operate in our own abilities. The Bible doesn't give a lot of information about our enemy Satan—in contrast, it tells us much more about our strength in Jesus. There are many examples of Jesus defeating Satan throughout the Bible. Here are just a few; read these Scriptures aloud as a group and discuss how we might practically apply them as we war in this battle:
 - Jesus praying for forty days in the wilderness, Luke 4:1-13
 - Jesus calming the storm, Mark 4:35-41
 - Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, Mathew 26:36-46
 - Jesus' victory at the cross, Mathew 27:45-54

Part 4

More than What We See

We all have a sense that there is more to this world than what our eyes can see. We often feel it around us. But because we can't see it, we struggle to believe it exists. In *Dark Intercept*, Jed goes on a spiritual journey as he confronts the enemy to save Sarah Beth. He walked away from his faith as a very young man, after facing real evil, because it was terrifying and simply too hard to believe in. As the story unfolds, Jed finds his way back to his faith but also confronts his past so that he can make sense of the spiritual battle he discovers around him. This requires faith, and for Jed it requires re-engaging with God directly, to find relationship and direction.

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

We believe in Jesus. We believe He defeated Satan at the cross. We believe that He was raised from the dead. We believe we are going to heaven. All of which we haven't seen, but we place our trust in Him. We must also believe in the existence of evil and that this spiritual war is real. The Bible is God's Word to us, and the Bible is quite clear on the nature of evil and the spiritual warfare raging around us, as we have read. In the end, what we choose to believe does not change this reality. Evil exists, and the devil and his forces are real and fighting in the spiritual realm just as the Bible tells us. We ignore this at our own peril and risk losing the battles Christ has set before us in His name!

Conversation Starters

1. Read 2 Kings 6:11-17 and Daniel 10:7-17. Discuss the invisible spiritual realm seen in these Bible examples. Can you think of a time when invisible forces might have been lined up against you? Can you see a time when God's forces were lined up for you? Share with the group if you're comfortable doing so.
2. The Bible is clear that the Lord is for us and will provide for and protect us. Read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. In this prayer, what is the one tool we can use to receive the Lord's protection? Do we tend to remember to ask for God to lead us from temptation? Could this be used in every one of life's moments? What victories could we know if we allowed these invisible forces to "deliver us from the evil one"?

Part 5

Trials, Tribulations, or Spiritual Warfare?

There is no doubt that in *Dark Intercept*, Jed is attacked by very real, evil forces. But his journey and struggle are a combination of attacks from the enemy and the very real trials and tribulations of living in a fallen world. At times, Jed is a victim of his own poor decisions. At times his suffering is simply losses that occur in our fallen world. And at times, he faces direct attacks from the enemy. How do these different things intersect? Understanding this helps us understand and therefore defeat our enemy.

It could be said we live in a war zone, but that doesn't mean that everything we go through is spiritual warfare. Any war will no doubt cause the surrounding people, land, and resources to be affected. These ripples can be felt hundreds of miles from the theater of war. It's important that we come to recognize the difference between trials of war and the war itself.

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever who does the will of God lives forever.
Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming,
even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

1 John 2:17-18

When Christians encounter trials and tribulations, we often assume it's spiritual warfare; however, it could be something other than a spiritual attack. In worldly war, noncombatants are often affected the most. Civilians are displaced; infrastructure is destroyed; resources are drained. In warfare, we call this "collateral damage." In our spiritual lives, our struggles can be direct attacks, or they may be the collateral damage of the war we live in—the effects of a world that is passing away, as we read above. The fact that this world's system is passing away will result in trials being felt. It's the outcome of sin in the world. But the Bible has this to say about trials:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance
finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

In contrast, when we talk about spiritual warfare, the focus is on the word *war* and what it means. When we engage in war, we are called to defend ourselves and fight back or at times to launch an offensive against a clear enemy to gain ground. Spiritual war will result in direct attacks that will attempt to prevent, delay, or compromise our work of reaching the lost for Christ, by being His light. At times these attacks separate us from those we hope to reach, but at other times they shake our resolve, damage our confidence, or even make us question our faith.

Any combat soldier will tell you that losing resolve, confidence, and faith in your chain of command is a poison that degrades combat readiness. In spiritual warfare, such attacks can cause depression, self-doubt, loss of family relationships, our heads being filled with lies—the enemy has multiple weapons he has formed against us. Our defense is Ephesians 6:10: “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

Conversation Starters

1. In war, we suffer loss directly and we see collateral damage to the surrounding areas. Living in or around war zones can be dangerous in and of itself, as we know, though most Americans have not fully experienced this type of scenario unless they have served in combat themselves. Even so, imagining both warfare and collateral damage can cause us to appreciate the differences. Describe the differences between trials, tribulations, and spiritual war. Could the answer be found in how it disrupts our efforts to reach the lost? Can you give life application examples? How might we know when to fight back?
2. How can we find guidance to differentiate between trials and true warfare and to know God’s plan for us in these situations? What is the role of prayer? Of time spent in the Word? Of community and time spent in groups?
3. What can you do when you find yourself in spiritual warfare? What does it mean, in this context, to arm ourselves for battle? A soldier being deployed into battle would carry weapons of war—a rifle, communication device, written plans from commanders who would give instruction. Discuss these in comparison to our spiritual weapons of warfare and find analogies. Do these same weapons find use in everyday life? Muscle memory of their weapons helps soldiers stay prepared and on guard; how could that be applied to our weapons of spiritual warfare?