**Carmen**

Jan and I first met Carmen when she interviewed at the Camarillo church to be our nursery attendant. She was a faithful Catholic girl with straight-“A’s” in school and could attend 6:30 am mass before she came to work at our church. Everything seemed perfect, our church fell in love with her as did Jan and I. All seemed well. When she graduated from high school, she enrolled at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and we thought that we would probably not see her again.

One Sunday afternoon at about 4 p.m., we received an emergency phone call from her. She was hysterical, wanting to meet us at the church and pray. We readily agreed, and when she came in the door, I could not believe how her appearance had changed. She told us she had pursued witchcraft as a college student, and now belonged to a coven in the hills around Santa Paula. She had just discovered that two of the more advanced witches of the coven had made a pact to harm her saying that the one who did the most damage would be the leader of the coven. She knew that she had no power to defend herself from either one of these, much less both.

As she fled out of the mountains, she tried to think where she had ever felt safe—and immediately our little Camarillo Church of the Nazarene came to her mind. Together, we began praying at the altar.

**Lesson One:** In my mind, there is no greater agenda in our churches or in our lives than to be a safe place for the people of this world. Perhaps a really important focus of prayer in our churches and in our lives is to ask God to reveal to us if there are things about us that might keep us from being safe in the spiritual battles that people experience.

As Jan and I prayed at the altar, I think both of us were shocked at how our efforts in prayer seemed to fight the enemy but did not bring victory. It was like a tug of war, and we were not losing, but we were not easily winning either. Carmen was of no help, though she wanted to be. It seemed to me that she was a prisoner without strength. Later she told me that though she was strong intellectually, all the verses of the Bible were unreadable to her—it was like all the letters had fallen from where they should be and were in a pool at the bottom of the page.

Fortunately, at about 4:45 p.m., choir members started coming for our evening choir practice. They saw us praying at the altar and recognized Carmen alongside us, and they began praying. You could literally feel the power of prayer increasing as each one joined. We finally were victorious.

**Lesson Two:** In all our prayer experiences, and especially in spiritual battles like this one, do not overestimate your ability. Bind together with as many people of faith that you can find, and that God can help you employ to win and find victory.

Because of privacy issues, I do not think I should tell you much more of the story. Carmen began walking with the Lord, I met with her weekly in discipleship and she even went into ministry for a while. Sadly, I don’t think the story ends well. Either knowingly or unknowingly, she was not careful in some of the decisions that she made, and I am told by a family member that the story now is not good. For years she has not responded to any contacts that I have tried to make. I continue to pray for her, I know God wants to help her, but the evil one has his eye on her for his purposes.

**Matthew 12:43-45** *“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it.* *Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.****45****Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”*

**Lesson Three:** In dealing with anyone being delivered from sin, this verse is important to impress upon them. I believe that the greater the hold the evil one has on a life, the stronger he will work to try to reclaim it for himself. We have no option but to be totally controlled by God through the Holy Spirit—regardless of what hold evil has had on us.