The Unseen Battle: Scripture, Story & Discernment

Participant narrative and breakout-room directions

Systematic Theology • Class 3 • Manual pp. 15–17

Essential question: How can fiction illuminate theology without becoming our authority?

Narrative: The Unseen Battle

Original educational retelling inspired by Chapter 6 of Frank E. Peretti's This Present Darkness. Not a quotation or verbatim audiobook transcript.

In the small town of Ashton, Pastor Hank Busche is facing growing opposition. His efforts to lead his congregation according to his understanding of Scripture have created tension within the church and the surrounding community.

But Frank Peretti invites readers to consider another dimension of this conflict—one that cannot be seen with human eyes.

Late one night, Hank struggles to sleep. His thoughts are troubled, and his surroundings seem unusually unsettling. Eventually, he falls asleep, only to awaken from a terrifying dream. He hears unfamiliar sounds inside his home. Is someone there? Is he imagining things? Is something more sinister taking place?

Hank begins to pray.

As the scene unfolds, Peretti allows readers to see what Hank cannot. In the spiritual realm depicted by the novelist, demonic forces have targeted the pastor. Their intention is to intimidate and overwhelm him. At the same time, angelic beings observe the confrontation. These heavenly warriors are presented as guarding people whose actions threaten the demonic forces operating in Ashton.

Yet the angels do not immediately intervene. The author portrays an invisible conflict unfolding alongside Hank's very real experience of fear and vulnerability.

As Hank moves through his home, the oppression intensifies. He becomes physically overwhelmed and falls to the floor. In desperation, he calls upon God. The oppressive encounter ends.

Hank's wife, Mary, awakens and finds her husband shaken. Together, they turn to prayer, seeking God's protection, strength, and guidance. The scene presents prayer as more than a religious routine: within Peretti's fictional world, it becomes a decisive response to spiritual opposition.

But the author also raises questions that deserve careful theological examination. What authority do angels possess? What limitations exist upon demonic activity? Does Scripture describe the spiritual realm with the same detail that Peretti provides? And what exactly happens when believers pray?

Peretti's portrayal is compelling because it makes the unseen visible. He gives actions and motives to spiritual beings that Scripture discusses but does not always describe in detail. That is where our responsibility as students of systematic theology begins.

The Bible teaches that believers face spiritual opposition. Ephesians 6 calls Christians to stand firm and put on the whole armor of God. Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as ministering spirits.

James 4:7 instructs believers to submit to God and resist the devil. Ephesians 6:18 emphasizes persistent prayer. Yet Scripture does not explain every mechanism of spiritual warfare.

As ministers, we must distinguish between biblical revelation and a novelist's imaginative interpretation. We must also consider how we respond when someone reports a frightening or troubling experience. Faithful pastoral care requires compassion, discernment, prayer, and appropriate practical support—not automatic assumptions about its spiritual cause.

Our purpose is not to decide whether Peretti accurately depicts every detail of the invisible world. Our purpose is to ask: How can we teach what Scripture reveals about angels, demons, and prayer without presenting literary imagination as established biblical doctrine?

Breakout activity • 25 minutes

- 3 minutes — Listen to or read the narrative.
- 13 minutes — Discuss all three theological lenses and the pastoral-care scenario. Select a facilitator, timekeeper, and spokesperson.
- 6 minutes — Three selected groups share one distinct insight each (2 minutes per group; no repetition).
- 3 minutes — Whole-class synthesis and practical takeaway.

Three theological lenses

Angelology & Demonology

Scriptures: Hebrews 1:14; Ephesians 6:10–18; James 4:7

What does the novel portray? Which elements are explicit in Scripture, and which are imaginative?

Prayer & Spiritual Warfare

Scriptures: Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16; Philippians 4:6–7

What does prayer accomplish according to Scripture? Does Scripture explain the mechanics of angelic strength?

Discernment & Pastoral Care

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 5:21; James 1:5; Galatians 6:2

How can Christians avoid assuming that mental illness or unusual behavior is demonic possession?

Pastoral-care scenario

A church member reports that a family member diagnosed with schizophrenia sometimes hears voices and expresses beliefs others find frightening. Another person insists the family member is demon-possessed and should receive deliverance instead of psychiatric treatment. How should a minister respond?

Discuss: What should the minister say and do? What harms could follow from labeling symptoms as possession? How can prayer coexist with appropriate mental health treatment? Where are the limits of pastoral expertise?

Guidelines for discussion

Do not diagnose the fictional individual or speculate about possession. A diagnosis of schizophrenia is not evidence of demonic activity. Respect dignity, confidentiality, and appropriate clinical care. Prayer and professional treatment can coexist.