Exorcism, Deliverance or Spiritual Warfare

Which One Do I Need?

A free companion guide on who is praying, for whom, how the Church discerns an exorcism, and your next step toward freedom.

Who Is Praying, and for Whom?

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between spiritual warfare, deliverance and exorcism? For a lot of people, all three words sound the same, and all three sound a little scary.

They all deal with the same enemy. But each one uses different tools. The simplest way to tell them apart is to ask two questions. Who is doing the praying? And for whom?

	SPIRITUAL WARFARE	DELIVERANCE	EXORCISM
WHO PRAYS	You	You	A priest, with his bishop's permission
FOR WHOM	Someone else	Yourself	Someone who can't pray for themselves
WHAT IT IS	Standing in the gap. Asking God for their protection, conversion and repentance.	Closing the doors you opened. Submit, repent, renounce, forgive.	The Church's approved prayers, called the Rite of Exorcism
WHAT IT IS NOT	Casting out, commanding or asking demons' names	Something someone else can do for you	Something anyone may try on their own
HOW COMMON	Every Christian is called to it	Many people need it	Rare
SCRIPTURE	Ezekiel 22:30	James 4:7-8	Mark 9:29

> *"It's really about who's doing the praying. Who's doing the praying for whom?"*

Most people who wonder if they need an exorcist do not. But many of us have a door or two to close. And all of us are called to pray for someone else.

Spiritual Warfare: Standing in the Gap

> EZEKIEL 22:30
>
> And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land.

Spiritual warfare is praying for someone else. It is standing in the gap, taking that person to the Lord and asking Him to move on their behalf. We pray for their protection, their conversion, their salvation, and for them to repent.

Many times the person we are praying for can't see clearly. They may not see that they need to repent or come back to the Church. So we lift them up. And the enemy does not want us to do that. But we can, because of our baptism.

The neighbor raking leaves

Picture this. We walk across the street, and the neighbor we don't know is raking leaves. And let's say God opens our eyes, and we can see the demons influencing that person. Do we have the right to start commanding those demons to leave?

Think of it this way. Do you have permission to walk into that neighbor's home and get something out of their refrigerator? No. You don't know them. Seeing it, or discerning it, does not give you permission.

But now say we go over, introduce ourselves, and help rake. We start serving them and building a relationship. At the end they say, "I'm going through a hard time. Could you pray for me?" Now that's different. And even then, we pray to God for them, not at their demons.

"If we start casting out those demons, we're bypassing their will."

What we do

- Bring the person to God
- Ask for protection, conversion and repentance
- Ask the Holy Spirit to convict them and open their eyes

What we don't do

- Cast demons out of someone else
- Command demons to leave
- Talk to demons or ask their names

We don't need those things to be effective. The demons came in through the person's own choices, so we ask God to help them make a new decision in their heart.

Deliverance: Closing the Doors You Opened

> JAMES 4:7-8
>
> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

If I said "youth ministry," you'd picture pizza, games, icebreakers, Bible studies and prayer. Each one is a tool to help young people connect with God. The ministry of deliverance is just as real, and it is a gift to the Body of Christ. It just uses different tools.

Most of us know "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." But what is the first part? Submit yourselves to God. That may be the most important part. Submit your marriage, your finances, even your past.

The tools of deliverance

- **Submit.** Hand every part of your life back to God.
- **Repent.** Turn away from the sin that opened the door.
- **Renounce.** Break agreement with the lies you believed.
- **Forgive.** Others who hurt you. Yourself, which can be the hardest. And sometimes God, by letting go of the disappointment and the expectations He didn't meet.
- **Confession, the Eucharist, prayer, the Rosary.** God's grace helps us put the enemy under our feet.

> *"I can't forgive somebody that offended you for you. It's up to you."*

That is what deliverance is. The person going through it prays for themselves, because they are able to use their own will. They repent. They renounce. They forgive. They close the doors they opened. Someone can walk beside them and teach them, but the closing is theirs.

And deliverance is not a one-time event. It becomes a lifestyle, something we do every time we step into the confessional. You really want to get free and stay free? Become a disciple of Jesus.

Exorcism: When Someone Can't Pray for Themselves

> MARK 9:29
>
> This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

An exorcism is a priest, chosen by his bishop, praying prayers on behalf of someone who can't do it for themselves. That person has opened the door to the demonic in so many areas of life that the enemy has taken over their body, their mind and their thoughts. They can't pray. They can't forgive. They can't walk into the confessional and take responsibility for their sins.

So the priest prays a set of prayers approved by the universal Catholic Church, called the Rite of Exorcism. The Church keeps this careful and protected for the safety of the person going through it.

Years ago I attended the school of exorcism in Rome. Hundreds of priests from around the world were there, being trained in the psychology, philosophy and theology of the enemy. I needed my priest's approval and a letter from my bishop just to attend. The Church does not take this lightly.

Did you know? If you were baptized, the Church prayed a simple prayer of exorcism over you (Catechism 1673). You were probably a baby. You couldn't pray for yourself, so the Church prayed for you.

After an exorcism

Many people who need an exorcism go through it more than once before they can use their own will again. Once they can, it's time for them and their family to step into deliverance and change the culture that opened the door. I believe every family with someone who has gone through an exorcism needs personal deliverance, each person, not just as a group, because deliverance gets deep and personal.

"An exorcist prays on behalf of somebody who can't do it for themselves."

How the Church Discerns an Exorcism

The Church is slow and careful here, on purpose. When someone asks for help, these are the steps a diocese and its exorcist usually walk through.

1. **Contact through the diocese.** Each diocese has its own process for people who believe they are under demonic attack.
2. **Doctors and counselors come first.** A medical and psychological evaluation rules out an illness that needs treatment.
3. **The exorcist is slow to believe.** The Church tells him not to believe too easily that someone is possessed, and not to explain everything away either.
4. **He asks about the person's history.** Psychics, mediums, the occult, witchcraft or spiritual practices outside the faith.
5. **He prays with the person and watches** for the signs the Church names, listed below.
6. **He never works alone.** Others are present, and if the person is a woman, another woman is in the room.
7. **He needs moral certainty.** Only then, and only with the bishop's permission, does he pray the Rite.
8. **He asks for the person's consent** whenever possible.

This can take months, sometimes a year, from the first phone call.

The signs the Church looks for

The Rite of Exorcism names signs that can point to possession. They are weighed together, after other causes are ruled out:

- Speaking or understanding a language the person never learned
- Knowing hidden or distant things they could not know
- Strength far beyond their age or condition
- A violent hatred of God, the name of Jesus, Mary, the saints, the Church, the sacraments and holy things

> Feeling cold, bad dreams, or things that go bump in the night are not on this list. And when these signs are not there, it does not mean nothing spiritual is happening. Many people are dealing with an open door, not possession. That is where deliverance comes in.

How to Move Forward

For yourself

1. Don't diagnose yourself. Most people who wonder if they need an exorcist do not.
2. Submit every area of your life to God.
3. Go to Confession. Receive the Eucharist. Pray every day, even briefly.
4. Close your own doors: repent, renounce the lies you agreed with, and forgive. Go deeper in forgiveness than you think you need to.
5. Take care of your body and mind too. If sleep, mood or health are struggling, see a doctor or counselor. It's not either/or.
6. Don't walk alone. Find people to walk the road with you.

For someone you love

1. Stand in the gap. Pray for their protection, conversion and repentance.
2. Serve them and build the relationship.
3. Have a Mass offered for them.
4. Don't cast out, command or question demons. Bring them to God.
5. Encourage them toward Confession and their priest.

If you believe someone needs an exorcism

1. **Reach out to your diocese.** Don't try to find an exorcist and call or email him directly. Every diocese has its own protocol.
2. **Expect a process.** Paperwork and an evaluation are normal, and it may take months or even a year.
3. **Plan for what comes after.** Once the person can use their own will again, they and their family begin personal deliverance.

What to avoid

- Psychics, mediums, "healers," or anyone who charges money to remove a curse
- Anyone outside the Church's guidance who casts demons out of other people
- Fear. The enemy wants you afraid of him or ignoring him. Clarity sets you free.

Two Prayers for the Road

Standing in the gap, for someone else

Lord, I lift up [name] and bring them before You. I'm standing in the gap, holding Your hand, Jesus, with my arm around them. Protect them. Holy Spirit, convict them, and open their eyes to see what is holding them back. Help them make the decision to repent, to confess their sins and to come home. Amen.

Closing a door, for yourself

Father, I submit myself to You: my past, my marriage, my family, my finances, all of it. I repent of the sin that opened this door, and I renounce every lie I agreed with. I choose to forgive [name], and I choose to forgive myself. I close this door in the name of Jesus and give this ground back to You. Fill it with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your next step

When I walk people through Discipleship Deliverance, there are five major doors I help them close. Start with my free guide, **The Five Strategies Behind Your Struggles**, at TheDirtRoadwithJansen.com. Join The Mile Marker and you'll get every free guide as it comes out.

Ready for personal freedom? Learn more at **DiscipleshipDeliverance.com**

Keep walking. You are not walking this one alone.

Sources: Catechism of the Catholic Church 1673; Code of Canon Law, canon 1172; the Rite of Exorcism (De Exorcismis et supplicationibus quibusdam, 1999), nos. 14 and 16; USCCB, Information on Exorcisms; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Inde ab aliquot annis (1985). Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSV-CE).