

Oliver and Nancy's church had been on the frontline of a battle to close a bar in their community. The late-night bar was a magnet for folks in the neighboring college town, which was a dry town, meaning no liquor was sold there. Bikers and college students flocked to the bar in droves.

For the last three years, the church had been petitioning the city council to shut down the bar due to the crime, noise ordinance offences with its loud music, bad language, brawls and drunk patrons. The small police force was taxed to its limit. The church even offered to purchase the bar to shut it down. Efforts to vote for the bar to be closed met with resistance. Now investors sought to change zoning to accommodate a new adult entertainment bar.

The town was being invaded and changed by enemy neighbors. The local government seemed to have lost sight of their duty to the town in favor of the financial gain that destructive enterprises would bring. The city council spoke of a river of cash flow that would allow them to enlarge the police department and make improvements to the town. It would be for the greater good of the community - schools and roads would benefit.

The church's pastor retired last month and the search committee just hired a new pastor. He had served in the

army and had seen combat duty before attending seminary. He was a sincere, friendly man, about fifty years old.

There was one other church in town, and the first thing the new pastor did was to get acquainted with the minister and get the lay of the land, so to speak, finding out how they could work together and help each other. It was a recon mission that would pay dividends.

Pastor Greg's sermons were rich in depth and most times we didn't want them to end. He got to know the congregation and we got to know him. After he had been here about four months, he announced a special meeting for next Saturday, a working lunch to discuss the community situation. He had already invited the minister from Grace Church, Jay Mobley, and their deacons to join them.

None of Pastor Greg's strategic training had been lost on him. As a newcomer, he scouted the residents and businesses, introducing himself, and getting a feel for what the town folks thought about the town.

The Saturday meeting opened with prayer for guidance and wisdom. Greg and Jay presented a summary of the problems. As you are aware, the strip club opened two

months ago, and a permit has been approved to install slot machines at the bar. As in other towns, gambling usually leads to pawn shops and check cashing stores opening up. It can also cause marital problems.

We understand the enemy and how it is working. Our problem in the past has been that we were working in the flesh. Our battle is Spiritual, and our Commander in Chief is the Lord. Not by might, nor by strength, but by My Spirit says the Lord.

How many will commit to the fight? It won't be easy, and victory may not come swiftly, but if we stay the course, we will prevail with the Lord's favor and guidance. He will go ahead of us, preparing the way.

Think of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Amalekites launched a surprise attack on them and they also had to engage in other battles along the way. God basically told the people through Moses, that He was not going to take care of the enemy all at once. There would be more battles. The Lord was telling them that He was preparing them every step of the way, teaching them how to fight, and how to become victorious.

It's the same with us. We've got to learn to fight spiritually. We have to say, "God I need you to give me wisdom for

this." If we don't follow God and His Word, we won't be victorious.

In addition to your daily prayers, we'll be meeting every week for strategic, specific prayer on Tuesdays. We'll alternate churches, starting next week at Jay's church. Don't be shocked or surprised if you see church members going into the bar or strip club. Your assignments may take you there too. In carrying out your assignments, always, always, always be friendly, kind and humble. No condescending attitudes, only an attitude of love. Now here are your assignments. Move out team!

Each person's assignment gave information about the job to be done, and info on the people they were to meet. Most of the women were assigned to strippers and waitresses at the club and bars. The info told them if they were students, mothers, married or single.

The first job for the women was for them to go as a group to take flowers to the strippers and waitresses for Mother's Day. The move so disarmed the girls that they broke down and cried, telling their stories of having to work to support a child, a parent or themselves. It opened the door for many other visits, and to form friendships.

Intel showed that some of the men played golf, liked football or enjoyed fishing. A group of four or five men would invite a bartender, bouncer or waiter to play a round of golf, attend a football game or go fishing. They were skeptical at first, but even the owner of the strip club joined in. They soon became regular outings with the church members footing the bill.

Over the months, the men and women shared their problems over a bbq or other outing. The church was able to help with car repairs, provide groceries, babysit a child for strippers, provide diapers and gas money. They also learned how people came to be in their situation, and that most did not like their jobs, but needed an income.

Little by little, the church folks worked to help arrange and provide for online education so that many could reach their dream of a degree and a better future. Business leaders volunteered their time to tutor and mentor. A fund was set up to provide professional clothing for interviews and transit cards for transportation to interviews. Professional interview coaches volunteered their time via Zoom meetings.

Church members met with grocery stores and big box stores in the next town to lobby for jobs to help get people out of the entertainment industry.

Three years passed. Eight people graduated with technical or bachelor's degrees. The church helped others move to states that offered free college tuition, helping with moving expenses and paying the first month's rent on an apartment.

All those that they helped could not understand why folks would help them and treat them as friends. It was the perfect way to tell them about Jesus. Many were led to the Lord including the owner of the strip club. He closed the club and asked that the property be rezoned for retail. He later sold the property to a restaurant chain.

The all-night bar had its liquor permit pulled for serving liquor to minors. Shortly afterward, the owner accepted an offer to purchase the building at a cut-rate price from an ice cream shop.

Oh yes, every member of the city council lost their seats in the last election. Most of the incoming council members are also church members.

The churches kept up with those they had helped, by email or by phone. Once in a while someone would come to the church to give a testimony, or just to visit to say Hi, and thank them again for changing the course of their life.

The battle plan was a good one. The Commander in Chief was honored and glorified. The commitment was harder than most expected. Their lives were rearranged in ways they could not have imagined. They grew in the Lord. Every battle and sacrifice was worth it.

We all cried when Pastor Greg left us. The Lord called him to a ministry to help other churches understand the battle and to train them to fight as we had fought. Our Tuesday prayer meetings are still going strong, but our focus is now on fighting Kingdom battles in the end times. We seek wisdom and direction to fight with precision and accuracy as David did in taking down Goliath. As we learned from Pastor Greg, strategic battles are won on our knees and our aim must be accurate.

Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of armies. -Zechariah 4:6