

FIRST PERSON: Christmas and spiritual warfare

By Meredith Flynn

A few years ago on Christmas Eve, I heard the song “This is War” by Dustin Kensrue. The lyrics highlight Jesus as warrior, come to earth to do battle with sin and death. No moonlit manger scene here, just the cosmic war for the souls of men and women.

“I get it,” I thought when I heard the song. “But maybe a little much for Christmas?”

Like a lot of Christians, I have a complicated relationship with the reality of spiritual warfare. If I label a trial or struggle as such, isn’t that a little presumptuous? Wouldn’t I have to be doing a really good job of living like Jesus to be engaged in a spiritual battle, to be anyone’s target? Perhaps that’s why a Christmas song focused on warfare initially struck me as dissonant with the spirit of the season.

Reminders of the battle

But the Bible is full of reminders that the battle is real and believers are on the frontlines.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” Ephesians 6:12 says, “but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”

Our church’s fall women’s conference was on Ephesians this year, and the final message focused on chapter 6 and the armor of God. We can’t afford to miss the nature of the battle, our teacher said.

Indeed, even at Christmas, the signs of warfare are all

around.

Brutal, endless violence abroad. Growing discord at home. One, two, three hard diagnoses for loved ones. The acknowledgement that so many people are facing so many hard things. There is so much darkness.

'But God'

And yet. Or as Paul writes earlier in Ephesians, "But God."

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4).

The battle swings in a completely different direction at the birth of Jesus. Immanuel, God with us, born to win the battle we can't fight on our own. Another song by worship duo Shane & Shane puts it this way: "I'm fighting a battle You've already won."

I've come around on "This is War." It turns out Christmas is the right time to focus on the battle and the King – graciously, humbly, mercifully born – to win it.

EDITOR'S NOTE – This story was originally published by Illinois Baptist.