

The Fight in Which We Find Ourselves

I have been in just one physical fight in my entire life. It was when I was in middle school. My friend and I were going into Pittsburgh to take summer classes at the science center. One of the classes involved building model rockets. We each built one. Once our rockets were complete, there came the day in which we got to test them. To do this, our class and our instructor walked several blocks through the city to a park that had enough space to fire the rockets in the air and retrieve them once they floated safely back to earth. On that day, we had to leave class early. So, my friend and I started back alone through the streets of the city, proudly carrying our brightly painted model rockets. A gang of about six boys ranging in ages from about 6 to 18 surrounded us. They grabbed my friend's rocket. I protested and grabbed it back and then turned to continue walking. The group encircled me. The younger ones kicked my legs while the older ones began taunting me. And then one of them punched me in the side of my head. My friend had taken off running. By now we were getting close to the Science Center where my dad was waiting with the car. My friend reached him, and my dad took off running toward me. It was just in time. Before I could be beaten any further, the gang saw my six-foot tall, broad-framed father coming at a run. They fled.



I find in that story a parallel to the reading from Ephesians today. In chapter six Paul is telling us that we are in a battle in the spiritual realm, beyond what we see in flesh and blood. In Pittsburgh that day we were walking along oblivious to the danger and the fight we were about to become involved in. In this passage, Paul talks about the importance of praying for one another in this battle. It was my friend's speedy request, like a prayer to my father, that saved the day. I was not prepared for a fight. I was not equipped. I was outnumbered by persons stronger than I was. It was my dad that saved me from the danger. In Ephesians, Paul tells us that the forces pitted against us are powerful, but that God is more powerful still. We are not able to stand against these forces on our own, but with the help that our loving, Heavenly Father provides, our victory is assured.

This passage speaks of spiritual forces, angels, and demons. If you struggle to believe that such a battle is raging around you, I encourage you to keep an open mind. This is inspired Scripture. There is a great danger that we go into battle unaware and unprepared against

immensely powerful foes. I do believe the battle Paul describes here is very real. I have experienced direct and specific spiritual warfare on multiple occasions. However, accepting that spiritual warfare is real, doesn't mean we blame the devil for everything, but it does mean we take unseen realities seriously. This enemy is powerful. We need to depend on God. We need the armor of God, rather than try to go face the weaponry of an entire army with merely a butter knife! We need to find our strength in God and take up the armor which He provides for us.



Day 35, Monday

Preparation: As you enter God's presence today, focus on breathing deeply. Breathe in the Presence of God and breathe out all of your old self, the sins that keep you from God. You might pray, "Lord fill me with Your Spirit" as you inhale and "Cleanse me of my sin" as you exhale. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in this time. Ask Him to open your eyes to see things as they truly are, to perceive the spiritual realities that only the eyes of your heart can see.

Introduction: These verses can be a little unsettling or even frightening. It is important not to be overwhelmed by the description of the foe we're up against, while at the same time not to underestimate the magnitude of the forces against us, the spiritual host of evil that assail the people of God. These verses remind us of our great need of God.

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-12 **Realizing What We're Up Against**

1. What two commands are given here?
2. "Be strengthened" is in the present tense which implies on-going and repeated action. How does one obey this passive command? What is my role, what is God's role in this? Where does the strength come from?
3. How does it enhance the meaning when Paul adds "in the Lord" to "be strengthened"?
4. What are believers up against? How is the enemy described? How is this more than merely human institutions and organizations?
5. How prepared do you feel to battle such enemies?
6. How is God's power described? (Compare what Paul says in chapter 1:18-21. Notice the nature of the power that he says there, is at work in you who believe.)

Close in prayer asking God to strengthen you with His mighty power.

Day 36, Tuesday

Preparation: Spend some time in prayer acknowledging your need of God. Ask Him to strengthen your spirit today with His mighty, supernatural strength. Ask Him to help you begin to see more clearly the spiritual battle that rages around you and how you are drawn into it. Praise Him that “greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4). In other words, praise God for His mighty power that is at work in you which is greater than the power of Satan and the host of evil around you.

Introduction: There is much insight in this classic text. We will spend more than one day on it so as to appreciate each piece of armor and its implication for our lives. There are generally two ways to understand the analogy of the armor. Take for example the belt of truth. We might understand that to mean we must put on God’s truth, strengthen our lives by knowing the truths of Jesus. Or we might understand this to mean that we are to put on truthfulness, speaking and living in a truthful manner. It is quite possible that both ways of understanding the armor of God are intended. We will focus on the first of these today and the second aspect tomorrow.

Reading: Ephesians 6:13-17 **Putting on the Armor of God**

1. What is the goal in putting on this armor, mentioned repeatedly in verses 13-14?
2. The word Paul uses here for armor, *panoplia*, means “the full armor of a heavy-armed soldier” with all the components. Why might we need such complete equipment to stand firm, especially in light of what we considered yesterday in verse 12?
3. The belt of truth – “girding the loins” was the function of the soldier’s belt. The belt kept loose garments from impeding the soldier’s movement. The belt holds everything together in place. How do you feel entangled when the truth is not clear?
4. How might knowing the truth (which Paul has emphasized in this epistle is important to do) help you stand unencumbered amidst the spiritual battles of life?
5. The breastplate of righteousness – the breastplate protected the soldier’s core, the vital organs. How can knowing God’s righteousness protect your soul’s core? How does knowing the righteous work of the Son of God strengthen and protect your heart?
6. The shoes of the gospel of peace – the shoes provided stability and ease of movement. How might knowing the peace that comes from the good news of the gospel help you stand against the deceit-filled attacks that come against you?

As you close in prayer, you might visualize putting on the belt of truth to hold everything together, and the breastplate of righteousness to protect your heart and the shoes of the gospel to stabilize you in the battle.

Day 37, Wednesday

Preparation: As you enter the Presence of God today – remember that He is depicted as a Mighty Warrior in several of the Old Testament Scriptures. This means He fights against the forces of evil that threaten your spiritual health and eternal well-being. Ask Almighty God to defend you today and guard you in this time so that you may hear from His Spirit correctly.

Introduction: For a second day we focus on the armor of God. Try to savor each piece of equipment and how it can strengthen you in your life.

Reading: Ephesians 6:13-17 **Putting on the Armor of God**

1. The shield of faith – it may be the Roman shield that Paul has in mind, a rectangular 2 and ½ foot wide and four feet high shield. How might knowing “the Christian faith” shield you from the fiery thoughts and attacks that the forces evil bring upon you?
2. The helmet of salvation – protecting the head in battle is perhaps most important of all. How can knowing that God is “saving” you, delivering you from sin, guilt and the deadly consequences of sin, protect your mind in this spiritual battle?
3. The sword of the spirit – the Word of God – the sword is the only offensive weapon, but it is used to defend against attack as well. Think of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness (see Luke 4). Note how Jesus used Scripture to ward off Satan’s temptations. How might the Word of God help you when you are under attack? How important might it be for you to know the Bible better?
4. Now consider putting on this armor to live into these qualities. Put on the belt of truth by living truthfully, the breastplate of righteousness by living an upright life, the shoes of the gospel by being transparent about your faith and speaking to others about the gospel, the shield of faith by placing your whole trust in the Lord, the helmet of salvation by deliberately filling your mind with thoughts of God’s deliverance, and the sword of the Spirit by reading, studying, and memorizing Scripture.
5. How would it feel to be so fully equipped in how you live, “knowing” fully God’s power at work in your life?

As you close, ask God to help you be strong in Him by putting on the armor He provides.

Day 38, Thursday

Preparation: Today’s focus is on prayer. Prayer is simply communication with God. What is on your heart and mind today as you enter this time? Can you just “talk” to God about these things. Take a few moments to just sit quietly in His Presence after you share your heart with God. What comes to mind? What might God be saying to you? Ask Him to continue speaking to you as you consider His Word for you in Ephesians today.

Introduction: The battle in which we find ourselves is intense. We do not even “see” our opponents, at least not with our eyes. They are cunning and powerful. They are plotting and scheming against God and therefore also against God’s people. The armor of God equips us for battle, but prayer is essential. In prayer we actively connect ourselves with God and invite His power into the circumstances of our lives. Paul has given examples of his own prayers in chapter one and in chapter three. Here, he exhorts believers to join him in praying continuously.

Reading: Ephesians 6:18-20 **The Essential Importance of Prayer in the Battle**

1. As we put on the armor of God, when are we to be in prayer?

2. How are we to pray?
 3. What are we to be praying for?
 4. The armor is God's. We need His strength in this battle. Yet we must be active. We must put the armor on. How is prayer also a way of being active, yet depending on God?
 5. Sometimes people think it is wrong or selfish to ask for prayer for themselves. Notice that Paul does ask for prayer for himself here. He is in chains, in prison. What does he ask the Ephesian Christians to pray for, for him? What is his primary concern?
 6. Who might God be prompting you to pray for today?
 7. Who might God be prompting you to ask to pray for you today?
- Close in prayer lifting up those whom God has brought to your mind.

Day 39, Friday

Preparation: What wars against your spirit today, what thoughts assail your soul? What troubles you? Invite the loving power of God into all of these, and any distractions that come to mind. Take each one and visualize yourself lifting it up and giving it to the Lord. Visualize Him taking each one from you. Ask Him to bless and guide your imagination today through the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit. Pray: Come Holy Spirit.

Introduction: This third day we try to put it all together. The complete armor of God is now before you. Make it your intention to not just let these be nice words. Heed Paul's command, given in the Spirit, and take up the armor God has given to you today!

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20 **Entering the Battle**

1. Spend some time visualizing yourself in the armor of God. In your sanctified imagination, visualize each piece of the armor. Look at it. Consider its use and meaning. Then visualize putting it on. Take a moment to see how it feels to wear it (to wear truthfulness or wear righteousness or wear gospel sharing, etc.).
2. Ask God to make you aware of how you are in a spiritual battle.
3. How might the things that trouble you and your struggles be against more than flesh and blood? Ask God to help you stand.

Close in prayer asking God, in His mighty power, to defeat the evil and unholiness you face – be it in the form of another person or a thought or a temptation that comes against you.

Day 40, Saturday/Sunday

Preparation: This is the final day for these devotionals in Ephesians. Spend some time thanking God for what He has shown you through your study of Ephesians and your time spent with Him. Thank Him in advance for speaking to you today in this time.

Introduction: These final verses include an introduction for the messenger who will deliver this letter. Some speculate that Tychicus may have been writing this letter down as Paul

dictated it. Paul takes time to introduce him, and to offer some final blessings. The last phrase of this epistle seems surprising and significant.

Reading: Ephesians 6:21-24 **Final Blessings**

1. For what purposes has Tychicus been sent?
2. How might Paul sending Tychicus for these reasons be a natural outworking of what he has been teaching in this epistle? How might it show he practices what he preaches?
3. Who might need news about you? Who might need your encouragement?
4. Paul closes with four words of blessing. Consider each, and how you see them operative in your life. How have you grown and discovered these more fully through your study of Ephesians?

*Peace

*Love

*Faith

*Grace

5. What do you think he means by the last phrase, "love incorruptible"?

As you close, ask God to strengthen your love to be incorruptible. Thank God for all that He has shown you through your study of Ephesians.