

Oh, I thought that little guitar blip was the music to bring me on stage. Got real excited. I thought, oh, nice. How are y'all this morning? I assume the people here survived the storm.

Those who didn't. There's still question marks beside their name at this point. But everyone. Everyone's fine. No major damage.

I'm hoping if there is, we'll pray about it. We've been going through a series on prayer, and we've had some pretty remarkable things happen through this series. I'll share some of them a little later into the message. Today, I'm going to bring up a topic that maybe some of you have interesting responses to. When I say the word spiritual warfare, what comes to mind?

What feeling do you experience? So if you grew up in some churches, the whole idea of supernatural stuff may be a little bit like, okay, we believe in Jesus, but that's about as far as we go. But I grew up in a church. We talked about spiritual warfare a lot. The battle we were in, the enemy came against us a lot.

We prayed a lot against. So there was. There was. Maybe if you grew up in Pentecostal churches, you know this. Any Pentecostals here in the room?

One, two, three. Okay, four, four, five. There we go. There's a few. There's a few back there.

So when I was growing up, we sort of was the charismatic brand of the Pentecostals. And, I mean, we prayed against the spirit of this, we prayed against the spirit of that. Anyone nodding their head and going, oh, yeah, yeah, I know. I know this. We rebuke the devil a lot.

Sometimes we rebuke the devil over each other. That got uncomfortable at times out in the parking lot. We came against Satan. We came in the name of Jesus. We bound spirits of this or spirits of that.

And maybe at times we fixated more on the devil than we fixed our eyes on Jesus, maybe. Which left me as a young kid feeling maybe a little anxious when it came to the topic of spiritual warfare. Left you feeling sometimes that Satan was behind every rock and bush just waiting to pass. CS Lewis has this great quote, and I think we've got it. We can put it up there.

But CS Lewis says this. There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race, humanity, can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence, but the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. So today we're going to talk about the reality that we have an enemy. So if this comes as news to you, I want to just alert you, if you are following Jesus, you have a real enemy, a foe that is against you.

But as we talk about the enemy, we're going to keep our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus and the truth of his word. So if you've got your Bibles with you, I want you to open to the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is in the New Testament. If you go through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that's the beginning of the New Testament. Scroll a little ways further and you'll get to Ephesians, some of the letters.

There's an ENS and ONS that you're going to get to find Ephesians, and you're going to look at Ephesians chapter six. If you got your, if you got your phone on you, I'm going to give you permission to open it up and turn in your Bible app to Ephesians, which is a little bit easier to find. Ephesians chapter six. I'm going to pray as you're finding Ephesians chapter six. And we're going to dive into spiritual warfare.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for the victory that you have won for us in Jesus through the work of the cross. Because of that, we can live in confidence, we can live in joy, we can live in freedom and victory. But oftentimes that freedom, that joy, that freedom, that victory comes at the expense of forgetting that we have a real enemy. And so we don't want to be ignorant of the enemy's schemes and plans to derail and disable and discourage our faith.

So today, as we open your word, teach us how vital prayer is to keep us battle ready. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Wednesday night in our men's class, our conversations tend to ramble around. If you've never been to our men's class, they tend to ramble around.

But Jeff Lampson brought up an old Sunday school song that I grew up singing. You might have. Well, it starts like this. I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy. Where?

Down in my heart. So that's not the part Jeff sang. Jeff sang this part. And if the devil doesn't like it, he can sit on attack. What situation?

Sit on attack. What? Sit on attack. Now, in all my experiences dealing with spiritual warfare, I don't remember a single time growing up in church where we rebuked the devil and said, go sit on attack, devil. We never did that.

But here's what I like about the song. What it lacks in, like, theological accuracy, it has in spades. The attitude that we should have about our enemy, the devil. Yeah, we don't care what you intend, devil. God intends good for us.

So I love this attitude. I'm not afraid of you. I've got Jesus. That's a pretty healthy attitude to have. But the Bible describes our enemy Satan like a roaring lion.

A roaring lion that is just pacing back and forth looking for whom he can attack and whom he can devour. Anyone familiar with that passage? We are not ignorant that our devil, although Jesus is far, far greater, he still has some. He still has some teeth. And so we need to be very mindful of that.

And because of that, I'm not sure how effective attack would be to keep him from pouncing. But thankfully, Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, if you're there, you're almost, you're ready to start. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us what an effective strategy and effective means is to counter or to get on the offensive against the enemy's tactics. So In Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 through 18, if you've got your Bibles, you can read along on your Bible app silently because I don't know sure what translation you've got, but if you don't have either of those, we've got it on the screen. And read along with me from the screen.

We're just going to read the passage together. In fact, let's stand as we read the passage together.

So verse 10 says this. Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.

And after you have done everything to stand, stand firm. Then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, you can be seated. So again, if you've been traveling with us through this journey through prayer, our humble and hungry series, you've been reminded over the course of Several weeks of a few truths. The first one is this prayer is important, but it's not hard.

Prayer is simply an honest conversation that we have with God about the things that matter to us and the things that matter to them. And Again, we unpacked 30 minutes of this topic. You can go back and look at it, but. But it sort of gets down to that point. God wants to have a conversation with us, and it's, it's.

He doesn't make it difficult for us. He says, just come cry out to me and I will answer. The second thing is this, that honest and humble prayer before God will inevitably lead us to a place of confession and repentance. Now, this is something we may not be prepared to deal with

all the time, but if we're being honest and humble before God, we will come to the place where we recognize that we are broken and sinful people who, even though God loves us and is doing this work of transformation in our lives, we still don't get it right all the time. Samantha Lee, if you remember the day we did that, we wrote some, Confessed some sins on little scraps of paper and then tore them up.

And Samantha took those little scraps of paper, paper representing all our failures. And she did this beautiful piece of art on the. On the window in the foyer. Take a look at that when you leave. Because it's a reminder of how God's love and transformation works when we humbly confess and receive God's forgiveness.

The third thing is that we don't just pray for ourselves. That's important, but we also pray for others. This is called intercession. So two weeks ago, after the message, we. We had people stand up, standing in for other people who are going through difficult, challenging things.

And we begin. And we prayed for them. Now, I've not heard any responses from that. I'm assuming people are experiencing the work of God in their lives as we've prayed for them. But I did hear from one person and I talked about that last week, Andrea, who we prayed.

She has two houses she needs to sell. She got an offer on one that afternoon. That afternoon. And then last night I heard that the. The second house, which had seen no activity, finally has a showing after several months.

So we're praying. If you're praying for Andrea, pray that the showing, the one showing that is going to be seen this afternoon is the showing that gets a sale and an offer. So we pray for others, we intercede for others. But today we're talking about this, a third aspect of prayer where we are reminded that prayer keeps us ready for battle, keeps us ready for the the warfare that comes with following Jesus. In a world that is opposed to the work of Jesus.

And understanding that there is a battle is important because while we don't need to be afraid, the devil can go sit on attack. As far as we're concerned, we do need to be prepared. We don't face the enemy on our own and we don't face the enemy empty handed. Second Peter 1, 3 says his divine power, God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life. And so we have in our arsenal all the tools, all the equipment, all the armor we need to withstand the devil's enemy, the devil's tactics.

But what does that look like? But we know this much. 2nd Corinthians 10, 4, 6 says this. The weapons that God has given us to fight our enemy are not like the weapons we're used to in this world. When we surrender control of our lives to Jesus, it starts to change

everything about us.

It changes how we interact with each other. It changes how we look at our neighbor. It changes how we view sex and morality. It changes how we eat and drink. It changes how we talk and it changes what we talk about.

It changes how we think and how we see ourselves. It changes everything. And it also changes how we fight. Now, we don't like to think about Christians fighting, but we have an enemy, remember? And so we are called to fight back against the enemy's schemes.

But the weapons that God has given us to fight our enemy is not like the weapons that the world uses our weapon. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but he's given us a sound mind. And God has not given us Facebook to fight our battles over. That's not one of the armor of God. So the.

But just because they're not the weapons that we're used to in the world, that doesn't mean they're any less powerful. In fact, just the opposite. In 2nd Corinthians 10:5, 6, Paul writes this. On the contrary, they have divine power. Power from God to demolish strongholds.

Strongholds are just fortresses, real or imagined fortresses that take control and take place and dig a firm roots into our thinking and our lives. And so with these weapons, these that have divine power, we demolish arguments, he says, and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. There's a lot in there. There's a lot in that passage. Leave it up there, because I'm going to talk about this for just a little bit.

So not only are our weapons different, but the enemy is different, too. Our enemy is invisible. Did you catch that? The spiritual battle isn't with people. It's not with parties, it's not with politics.

Politics.

It's not even really with the visible positions that we see represented in the world. Paul makes it clear. It's with, get this, rulers, authorities, and forces of evil that we cannot see. And he calls them. He says these reside and live in this place called the heavenly realms, meaning it's just outside of our field of vision.

It's not like they're all up there with. With our Heavenly Father, but they live in this place where we cannot. We cannot ascertain them by our natural senses. But these forces exist nevertheless, and they influence our arguments. Paul uses that word, the arguments, which is really just the way we reason the world and make sense of the world,

our reasonings.

He says it influences our pretensions. Pretensions are another fancy way of saying our opinions. Everyone has one and they all stink. Generally speaking, these pretensions set themselves up against God, and he says it influences our thoughts. So in other words, the broken world, all its broken systems, led by very broken people, aren't the enemy.

Instead, and I've got to be careful how I say this, but I think there's something to this. I'm going to step over here. So this is not theology. This is Tim talking. It's almost how we think about those things.

Do you understand what I'm saying? It's not about those people or those positions or those parties or those faraway places. And it's not about Putin. It's about how Putin gets into our head or the forces behind our enemy gets into our head and has us think and act and respond in ways that are counter to the will and will of God. Okay, I want to step back over here because that was off the cuff, and I don't want anyone recording that and saying, here's what Tim believes about this.

But it's close. I'm getting there in my own head. This is how I think about these things really is reflective of how those forces of evil in the heavenly realms affect and influence me. So the believer who gives space in his head and in his heart for the influence of those of those forces of evil will find himself spiritually crippled. And God does not want us spiritually crippled.

So he gives us these divinely empowered resources that Paul calls the full armor of God. Paul does something very clever here. Like every good teacher, he creates sort of this illustration. When I was growing up, it was a. It was one of those little felt felt things that you pulled off all the little different.

Remember this, Steve? You pulled off the sword, you pulled off the breastplate, and you held them. You talked about these different pieces of armor. But this is more than just a clever illustration. Understanding the armor of God can transform our prayer life.

And here's where we're gonna get real practical. So are you tracking with me so far? Are you with me so far? So what we're gonna do for the rest of the sermon is we're gonna walk through the armor of God, and we're just gonna look at the armor of God very quickly, and then we're going to begin praying specifically around these different aspects of the armor of God. So if you are here this morning and you are feeling the weight of some sort of spiritual attack in your life, and I would suspect there are a lot of us who are feeling this in our lives, here's what we're gonna give you.

Some practical. I'm gonna try to give you some practical things to do, practical ways to pray, so that you have what you need to counter the lies and deceptions of the enemy. So we're gonna begin. We're just gonna dig right in in Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 14. And here's what Paul says.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. What does a belt do for me? It keeps my pants up. It encircles. It holds things together.

And the belt of truth wraps around us. It binds us to God's truth about us. It binds us to God's truth. God's reality about whatever situation we're in. Our minds can deceive us, but God's truth keeps us grounded in the reality of ourselves and our situation and the truth.

Jesus says the truth sets us free from being bound by the devil's lies. So we pray. We pray the belt of truth. Jesus says your word is truth. John says that John says your word is truth, speaking of the word of God.

And so we armor up in prayer with God's truth. And here's the prayer that we're just going to pray right now together. You can close your eyes, you can stand up, you can kneel while we pray this prayer. You can sit right here and just sort of immerse yourself in it so you can pray it later at another point in time, but we're gonna pray this prayer right here in Fact, I want you to pray it with me. Ready?

Okay. In Jesus name I put on the belt of truth and pray that I may be centered and and encircled by your truth. Today, by your power, enable me to walk in your truth and to give no place to the deception of the enemy. Protect me by the truth of your word. If you are being hounded by lies from the devil, I want you to start praying this prayer.

The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. A breastplate protects the heart. It protects us from those things that are unrighteous, that are immoral, that are impure. And we get attacked with that stuff all the time. But the breastplate of righteousness keeps us in the right place.

Now, he says, take it up. Meaning it doesn't just lay there in front of us all the time. We have to initiate some sort of thing to bring this to play in our lives. And he says, take it up. So we pick it up.

Now, here's what this looks like in real time. Philippians chapter four says, this is how we exercise the shield of breastplate of righteousness. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. I'm going to step over here

again. Last night I had a moment where I had the temptation to go into a place of distrust and suspicion.

And I recognized it immediately. I'm like, ah, that is not a pure, noble, good, trusting thought. That is a wrong thought. I'm going to pick up the breastplate of righteousness. I'm going to put it over my heart, and I'm going to think differently about this situation.

So. So I did it. Here's how we pray in those situations when unrighteous thoughts and unrighteous thoughts are just thoughts that don't honor God, that don't reflect the heart of God. Here's what we pray. Jesus.

Pray it with me. Jesus, I put on the breastplate of righteousness. I am covered with your righteousness today in my body, soul and spirit. So guard my heart and protect the most vulnerable places in my life with thoughts that are right, good and noble. It's a powerful prayer.

The third thing is this. Our feet are to be fitted with the gospel of peace. Now, I've learned the hard way, if you're traveling on a long journey and you have bad shoes, it can be a miserable experience. Amen. Anyone?

Shoes are very important for long journeys, and spiritual shoes are no exception. Shoes sold with a Good thick layer of the gospel of peace means that wherever we go, no matter how difficult the train or the people or the journey or whatever, no matter that whatever we encounter and whoever we meet, Jesus is right there with us, supporting us, encouraging us, carrying us. Let's be honest, half the time.

Here's our prayer. Jesus, I put on the shoes of peace. I stand on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ. The good news of his amazing grace cover my anxious heart and mind with the peace of God that transcends all understanding, so that I am ready to share your good news with others. I tell you, when we're going through difficult journeys and our minds are not at peace, it's hard to share Jesus.

It's hard to represent Jesus. So we want our lives, our hearts, our minds to be shod with that gospel of peace. The other thing is the shield of faith. Like the breastplate of righteousness, we have to put it on, we have to pick it up. But the shield of faith is important because the shield of faith protects us from the fiery darts of the evil one.

One of the devil's favorite scenarios, and he's got a lot of different favorite scenarios, but one that he likes in my life, he loves to use in my life, is watching how I react when God doesn't answer a prayer of mine the way I want God to answer that prayer. Anyone familiar with that scenario where God doesn't do what you thought he was going to do

or you prayed he was gonna do, and he says, I'm not gonna do that. I'm gonna do something different. And you're like, oh, okay. So here's what happens.

The enemy uses that opportunity to start to shoot some fiery darts. Has anyone ever been hit with the arrow of disappointment? Anyone? Yep. Yep.

Devil loves that one. How about the arrow of confusion? Oh, wait, God, I thought anyone got a little. Ever had dealt with some confusion when it comes to God? Okay, Brian, thank you for being honest.

How about an arrow of doubt? Like, I don't know, I guess God doesn't love me. I guess God doesn't care about my situation. The shield of faith protects us from those fiery darts because that's exactly what they are. They're arrows from the enemy.

I always go back to the story of Habakkuk. Habakkuk is one of the last books of the Old Testament. When you need to know, you need to read Habakkuk. Because years ago, I heard a preacher say, you need to read Habakkuk because when you get to heaven, Habakkuk is going to ask you if you read his book. So you need to read Habakkuk.

But Habakkuk is all about a prayer for God to do something. And at the end, God says, no, I'm not going to do that. And Habakkuk ends that book with this. With this amazing, amazing response of faith where he says, though the fig tree fails to blossom, though there's no fruit on the vine, though the product of the olive tree fail, though the economy is devastated, though nothing goes the way I hope and pray it will go. He finishes this way in Habakkuk, chapter 3, verse 18.

He says, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord and I will be joyful in God, my Savior. That is the shield of faith. Alan Burris says something like this. He's got a variety of ways he says it, but it comes down to this. The essence of faith, he says, is trusting God with the unanswered questions.

We all have unanswered questions. And for many people, the unanswered questions derail your faith. But that's the whole point of faith. When the questions remain unanswered, when the questions don't get answered the way you want them to be answered, that becomes the place where faith actually begins to demonstrate and prove itself. We're gonna trust God even when we don't understand what's going on.

No matter the circumstances, keep faith in front of you. This shield of faith, keep it in front of you and those flaming arrows won't do lasting damage. So how do we pray? How do we pray? Let's do it this way.

Jesus, I take up the shield of faith this day and in your name turn it

against every arrow directed at me and the people in my care. I bind every fearful thought in Jesus name and choose to walk by faith and not by sight. Amen.

Then the helmet of salvation. Hats are also important. Hats sort of signify who you are and who you belong to. If you're in the army, you got a different hat than the guy in the navy. They signify something.

And the helmet of salvation signifies something important. It reminds us that we live under the authority of Jesus. From the very tip top to the tippy toes, everything belongs to him, including our thoughts. And remember, Paul says we're to take captive how many thoughts? Every thought.

Think about that. Every thought, not just the bad ones. That's what we think. Oh, take captive the bad thought. We're to take captive every thought, every thought we have should be under the authority of Jesus.

Now, how do we do that well. We begin to pray this way. Jesus, I put on the helmet of salvation and pray that you would protect my mind from thoughts that are not from you, that could lead me astray. Just. Just pause.

Good thoughts can lead you astray. We want thoughts that are in submission to Jesus. So transform my mind by the power of your Word and grant me a hope saturated mind so that I may truly overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. We want to live in this place where we are mindful that Jesus is the answer for the world today. And Jesus is the answer for.

For me and my situation. And because I live under the authority of Jesus, Jesus has my life well under control. No matter what happens, I can trust Jesus. I can live in this hopeful place that he's working all things out for my good. Even though right now it's pretty rough, but he's working all things out for my good.

Then he says, finally, and this is finally. This is the last thing he says, finally at the very end. Now that you've suited up with all you need, now you can actually pick up a weapon. Not until then. Don't be wielding the sword of the Spirit before you have your feet shod with the gospel of peace.

Don't be trying to pick up the sword of the Spirit before you've got the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith. No, no, no, you need to have this stuff on first. Cover yourself first with what God has given you to protect you before you go after the lion that wants to devour you. Okay, here's what he says. Pick up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This is the first piece of defensive armor, defensive weaponry. But

the Holy Spirit empowers the word of God in our lives for fighting off the enemy. If you remember in the Gospels, one of the first encounters we have with Jesus is this sword fight. Now do you remember this sword fight that he has? Remember that?

No one. Jesus and the sword fight. You don't remember the sword fight? Jesus meets his enemy out in the desert and the enemy, Satan, starts to toy with him a little bit. Hey, hey, if you're the son of God, why don't you do this?

Turn the stones to bread and hey, throw yourself off and let everyone see how what a big God you are. And how does Jesus respond in those situations? He picks up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and he begins to parry and thrust. He says, no, no, no, the Word of God says, the Word of God says, the Word of God says, and the enemy is completely disabled. Every line of attack Satan threw at him was deflected by Jesus using God's Word.

So how do we use God's Word? Well, David wrote in Psalm 119, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. The word hidden in our heart becomes the weapon that will deflect the enemy's attacks. Now, I don't want you to be any more disappointed in me than you already are, but here's the truth. My weak flesh can find a thousand things that I would prefer to be doing on many occasions than sitting down with the open word of God.

Am I the only one that Satan loves to pull my mind in a thousand? I could be cleaning out the closet. I could be mowing the grass. I should go get groceries. Oh, I be.

I mean, I could do my crossword puzzle. Oh, I could do this devotion, this devotion that I love so much. I could be doing the devotion instead of actually reading God's Word. My weak flesh can find a thousand things it would rather do than immerse myself in God's word. But that is where.

That is where power lies. When we are fighting and coming against the enemy's advances in us, this is the offensive weapon against the lies of the enemy. So if you struggle with spending time in God's Word, you don't have to admit it today, but you can admit it in your heart and say, lord, that's me. I confess that I'm challenged by spending time in your word. Here's the prayer, Jesus, pray it with me.

Jesus, please give me the insight, wisdom and revelation to wield your word skillfully against every scheme of the enemy. Thank you that your word on my lips has the power to. To defeat every attack of the enemy. And Lord, teach us to love your Word. Teach us to love your Word.

What's the bottom line? Paul finishes this passage in Ephesians 6. This way. He says, Pray, pray, pray. Ephesians 6:18.

Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests with this in mind that you have an enemy. Be alert and always what? Keep on praying for all the Lord's people. There's no need to fear our enemy. There's no need to get sweaty and nervous.

When someone brings up the topic of spiritual warfare. Paul says, here's what you got to do. Just stay alert. Keep your eyes open. Because he can be sneaky.

Stay alert. Don't get tricked. Stay alert. Stay in the Word and keep on praying. Keep on praying.

Keep on praying. For anything he says, for anybody, at any time. Pray. We're getting ready to share in a time of communion. And as we do again, we remember that in this battle against our enemy, we do not fight for victory.

Victory has been accomplished through the cross, through Jesus. The work of the cross, when Jesus says it, is finished. Part of what was finished was this binding that we had to sin and death and hell and the grave that got broken. We are no longer in chains to the enemy, but I tell you, we can very easily cede back territory to him that Jesus won for us on the cross. So he says, don't do that.

Don't let yourself get played by the devil. Instead, stay alert. Stay in the word and keep praying. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the promise that no weapon formed against us shall prosper. Thank you for equipping us with everything we need for life and godliness and everything we need to face the enemy with confidence and even, even excitement.

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers and authorities and the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the invisible world. So thank you that you made it possible for us to be strong in your mighty power, to stand against all that the evil one intends. Lord, we thank you for the cross and for the freedom and joy that we've experienced because of your obedience.

Help us to live in a manner suitable for those who live in victory. In Jesus name, amen.

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