Walking to Battle

God provides believers with all the resources needed to live Christlike lives.

The 2014 movie American Sniper depicted the heroic and tragic story of Chris Kyle, a U.S. Navy Seal, sharpshooter, and Iraqi War veteran with multiple tours. The film highlighted Kyle’s military success but also showed the awful toll the war took on his personal and family life—even after his active service ended. His life was cut short when he was shot and killed by a fellow soldier with severe post-traumatic stress disorder whom Kyle was trying to help.

Since I never served in the armed forces, the movie’s realistic and brutal depictions of combat left me dumbstruck. I was intrigued, however, by the American soldier’s battle uniform, equipment, and technological resources. Can you imagine what a battle-tested, first-century Roman soldier might have thought on seeing a modern soldier’s equipment? In reality, although weaponry and technology have changed, the primary purpose of a first-century soldier’s armor was the same as today’s equipment: to protect the soldier’s body as much as possible while also giving the soldier flexibility to take the fight to the enemy.

When the apostle Paul wrote his Letter to the Ephesians, he likely saw each morning a fully uniformed Roman soldier standing guard in his rented house (Acts 28:30). As Paul came to the conclusion of his letter, the soldier’s armor reminded him of every Christian’s daily battles against the “evil, spiritual forces in the heavens” (Eph. 6:12). God has provided His people with the most effective spiritual armor they will ever need. The only question is whether the believer will take advantage of this armor or try to fight the enemy without using it.

In this session’s Bible passage, Ephesians 6:10-20, we will explore Paul’s analogy of the Roman soldier’s equipment to prepare believers for the inevitable spiritual warfare they must fight. Paul emphasized that God provides all the resources needed for believers to live victorious, Christlike lives.
SESSION 13: Walking to Battle

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

We have come to the final session in our study of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. To briefly recap the letter thus far, in the first three chapters of the epistle Paul scaled spiritual and theological heights by expounding the glory of God in Christ and the magnificent transformation believers receive in Him.

Beginning in chapter four and running through this session’s focal passage, Paul challenged Christians to “walk the walk”—that is, live the kind of lifestyle—that is consistent with their new life in Christ. Such a lifestyle includes displaying unity of the Spirit with other believers in the church (4:1-10); growing in faith and service as God-given leaders equip the saints for ministry (4:11-16); shedding old habits and practices such as lying, angrily taking revenge, stealing, and using foul speech (4:17-32); replacing old habits and practices—especially all forms of sexual immorality—with actions that demonstrate Christlike love, goodness, righteousness, and truth (5:1-14); living wise and Spirit-filled lives in stark contrast to the wicked worldly culture surrounding them (5:15-21); and managing their families in the same Spirit-filled unity and power that characterizes the relationship of Christ and His church (5:22–6:4).

We can imagine that as Paul reflected on what he had written thus far in the letter and contemplated what he needed to say in closing that he glanced across the room at his assigned guard, a Roman soldier decked out in full uniform and bearing both a shield and sword. Perhaps God used that scene to inspire Paul to close his letter with an emphasis on spiritual warfare. The apostle could attest from his own Christian life experience that believers must be clear-eyed and serious about daily living as followers of Christ. It is truly a new life of love, hope, unity, and victory in the Lord. But until Christ’s return, the Christian life also is a daily battle against dark, entrenched forces of spiritual wickedness that never take a day off and never give any follower of Christ a free pass. Believers must be—and can be—prepared for the devil’s daily assaults by putting on the armor of God and utilizing it every day.

By ending his letter with an appeal to beware of the devil’s schemes, Paul was emphasizing the reality of the devil as an evil spiritual being. He is at work in the world. Nevertheless, the devil has already been defeated by Jesus through His death on the cross. Jesus has already been seated “far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion” (1:21). In the passage for this session, we will learn not only about God’s provision of all the resources we need to prevail in spiritual battles but also about our need to be prepared for daily spiritual battles, depending on our sovereign Lord for victory.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

AWARE (Eph. 6:10-13)

Paul asked the recipients of his letter to take a stand against the devil, realizing that believers battle daily against spiritual forces of wickedness. Paul explained that in salvation God provides spiritual armor for believers to wear.

VERSE 10

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength.

The apostle indicated that he was about to conclude his letter with the word finally. Lest the believers of Ephesus think that they could live the victorious Christian life in their own strength, Paul urged (or commanded) them to be strengthened by the Lord. Like Paul’s previous exhortation for believers to “be filled by the Spirit” (5:18), the verb be strengthened (“be strong,” KJV; ESV; NIV) is in the present tense (ongoing action) and the passive voice (the subject is acted on). Thus, Paul was urging believers to keep on being strengthened (empowered) by the One who is all powerful and who freely grants His people power through the indwelling Spirit.

The phrase rendered by his vast strength (“mighty power,” NIV) literally reads “in the strength of His might.” The phrase highlights the combination of two Greek words. The effect of combining these terms has a similar purpose in English when we refer to something’s being a superpower. The Lord’s power is vastly greater than any other type of power.

VERSE 11

Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil.

God’s power is vastly greater than human strength. Paul urged the recipients of his letter to realize that another type of power stronger than human strength was constantly at work in the world. He described this malevolent power in terms of the schemes of the devil. Paul had already referred to this spiritual enemy in Ephesians 2:2 as “the ruler of the power of the air” and in 4:27 as “the devil.” Indeed, Revelation 12:9 makes clear that the devil is one and the same as Satan (a name that means “adversary”) and “the ancient serpent”—the one that appeared in the garden of Eden and successfully tempted the first man and woman to sin against God. From the beginning of human history until now, the devil has been active in the world, “prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).
Moreover, he will continue his attacks on God’s people until Christ’s return, at which time he will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

In the meantime, how can believers hope to stand against such a strong, evil power? We must put on the full armor of God. The Greek root word rendered armor often referred to a weapon or an instrument of battle. The related form of the word Paul used in Ephesians 6:11 is akin to our modern English word panoply. That is, Paul was referring not to just a single piece of weaponry but to the entire battle uniform, both defensive and offensive resources. God gives His people the full spiritual resources not only to defend themselves from attacks but also to take the battle to the enemy by carrying the gospel message to all the nations (see Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 10:3-5).

VERSE 12

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

If believers are to be spiritually prepared for Christlike living, they must know the truth about their real enemy and employ the right strategy for defeating him. Paul minced no words: the effective, growing Christian life is a daily struggle, an ongoing series of battles. The power of the enemy might be manifested through the agency of wicked people or pagan government officials (flesh and blood). Nevertheless, Paul understood—and all believers need to realize—that the ultimate battle for believers is spiritual in nature.

Paul identified several types of spiritual forces that are at work in the world to trip up, harass, tempt, and defeat Christians. First, the terms rendered rulers (“principalities,” KJV) and authorities (“powers,” KJV) evidently describe two types of evil spirits that work in and through opponents of the gospel who are in positions of political power. Herod the Great was an example of such a political leader. His wicked animosity toward the newborn Christ could only be explained as the work of an evil spirit (or spirits) residing in this human ruler’s heart (see Matt. 2:16-18).

Second, the phrases cosmic powers of this darkness and evil, spiritual forces in the heavens warn believers that these satanic spiritual forces and beings use their power to destroy lives. Christ, through His sinless life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, defeated the devil and his demonic minions. One day Christ will return in glory and will banish His enemies forever to the abyss of hell. The devil’s only present power is to harass and fight against the followers of Christ. Yet, we do not have to battle the enemy alone or unprepared. We have the Lord’s armor that is more than sufficient to protect us and equip us for the battles we face.
VERSE 13

For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

Having learned about the nature and goals of our real enemy, we as believers now can better understand the urgency of Paul’s command to take up the full armor of God. The Greek verb rendered take up (“put on,” NIV) can also mean “pick up” or “raise up.” The idea is that the armor is there; the Christian is already in possession of it. However, we must not fail to put on the armor each day, to actually utilize the resources God has given us by the indwelling Spirit. Utilizing the full armor of God requires intentionality.

What result may be expected by those who are thus spiritually prepared? First, believers will be able to resist in the evil day. The verb translated resist implies standing strong against great opposition. Second, believers who have prepared everything in their spiritual arsenal will indeed take their stand successfully against the spiritual forces at work against them. If we have prepared well, we can be sure that in the end we will stand.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Arms and Armor” on pages 118–121 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How does the analogy of spiritual armor encourage you in your Christian living?

PREPARED (Eph. 6:14-17)

Paul identified parts of the spiritual armor God gives His people. These parts include His Word and the truth of the gospel.

VERSE 14

Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest,

Paul again exhorted his readers to stand. He followed this with a vivid description of various parts of the “full armor.” There were five components of defensive equipment and one offensive weapon. As mentioned previously, Paul’s use of armor as an analogy may well have been prompted by the presence in his rented house of a Roman guard in full uniform. Possibly, though, the apostle may also have been informed by Old Testament passages
such as Isaiah 59:17, which describes God as a divine warrior fighting for His people: “He put on righteousness as body armor, and a helmet of salvation on his head.”

Paul may have identified the various parts of armor in the order that a Roman soldier dressed for battle. Thus, he began by urging believers to put on **truth like a belt around your waist**. The soldier’s belt was typically a leather strap worn around the midsection. The soldier’s tunic undergarment could be gathered under the belt for quick movement, and the belt could also hold a scabbard or serve as a holder for a dagger. As such, the belt was a source of hidden strength and confidence. In spiritual terms, the Christian soldier’s belt is **truth**. In one sense, Paul may have been referring to the Scriptures as the believer’s belt of truth. Yet, he was explicit in Ephesians 6:17 that God’s Word is the believer’s offensive weapon (sword) against the devil’s schemes. Thus, it is likely that in verse 14 Paul had in mind **truth** as a general spiritual quality—that of sincerity, honesty, integrity, and so forth.

Second, Paul urged believers to depend on their God-given **righteousness like armor on your chest** (“the breastplate,” KJV). An ancient soldier’s chest protector might be made of either thick leather or hammered bronze. It was worn to protect the soldier’s vital organs (heart, lungs, stomach) from being pierced. Such a wound could end the soldier’s life. Paul thus compared this vital piece of armor with the believer’s **righteousness**, or right-standing with God. We receive righteousness only by believing in Jesus Christ; indeed, He is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). Moreover, we demonstrate our righteousness through righteous living. Paul may have had both of these spiritual realities in mind.

**VERSE 15**

and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

Next, Paul exhorted believers to always have their **feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace**. The apostle had in mind the Roman soldier’s sandals that could be described more precisely as a type of boot. The bottoms of the sandals were equipped with thick leather soles and often were embedded with studs, or cleats, for traction. On the top side, the sandals were often open-toed, and leather straps attached to the ankle area could be wound around the soldier’s lower legs to avoid losing his footwear when marching, running, or fighting.

In spiritual terms, Paul identified the Christian’s “sandals” as being ready for the gospel of peace. Three applications of this piece of armor come to mind. One, as believers we are to be constantly ready to share the gospel with others, especially with the lost. Two, the gospel of peace is an unshakable spiritual foundation for Christians as they navigate the challenges and
difficulties of life on this side of Christ’s return. And three, the gospel of peace is the believer’s guarantee that one day the battles will be over and God’s peace will reign on earth. We will have peace with God, and we will enjoy daily the peace of God that “surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

VERSE 16

In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Paul then urged believers to take up the shield of faith. A Roman soldier’s battle shield was not typically a short half-shield wielded in hand-to-hand combat. Rather, it was a full-length shield that protected the soldier’s body even in a standing position. A line of foot soldiers with shields could create an effective wall of defense against hordes of flying enemy arrows.

Not surprisingly, then, Paul recognized the shield as a vivid analogy of the Christian’s faith. In this context, the apostle no doubt was referring to the believer’s wholehearted trust in—confident, unswerving reliance on—God. Surrounded by their faith, believers are able to extinguish all the flaming arrows (“fiery darts,” KJV) of the evil one. What are the devil’s flaming arrows? They can be doubts, discouragements, temptations, selfish and impure thoughts, or fears. As believers, we can avoid these arrows with faith.

VERSE 17

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

The Roman soldier’s helmet was typically made of bronze or iron. Its purpose was self-evident—to protect the soldier’s head from crushing blows. Thus, Paul identified the believer’s helmet as salvation. He may have been thinking about salvation from sin through faith in Christ. An alternate view is that Paul was referring to salvation in the general sense of rescue from danger. In either case, salvation comes from God, whose power to save is vastly greater than the power of sin, death, or the devil.

Similarly, the believer’s sword is an instrument of God’s power that can be used both defensively and offensively. In his analogy, Paul likely had in mind the Roman soldier’s short sword that was used in hand-to-hand combat. In spiritual terms, the believer’s weapon is the sword of the Spirit. Grammatically, this phrase can mean either “the sword that the Spirit provides” or “the sword that is the Spirit.” Either meaning emphasizes the active measures the Holy Spirit takes in protecting and empowering believers. However, the first meaning seems more likely in light of Paul’s further description of the sword as the word of God. This is almost certainly
a reference to the Scriptures, which are inspired by God and are able to give “wisdom for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). Further, the Scriptures are “profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (3:16-17).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Think about Paul’s spiritual applications for the believer of each piece of God’s armor. In what areas do you need to better prepare for spiritual battles? How does the fact that God has provided armor for His people encourage you in living the Christian life?

FIELD SUPPORT (Eph. 6:18-20)

The apostle emphasized the importance of prayer for the person going into spiritual battle and for those already in the battle. Prayer is how the armor is deployed and victories are won.

VERSE 18

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

Having described the Christian’s armor, Paul now addressed the believer’s best strategy for gaining spiritual victories. That strategy includes prayer—Spirit-filled, comprehensive, persistent prayer for oneself, for other believers, and for the gospel mission. Further, the Greek verb rendered pray is in the present tense, indicating that believers are to keep on praying.

When do we pray? At all times. There is never a bad time or a wrong time to pray. Further, every situation we face is worthy of our praying about it.

In what attitude do we pray? We are to pray in the Spirit—that is, motivated by and helped along by Him. He intercedes on our behalf when we do not know what to pray for (Rom. 8:26).

What kinds of prayers should we offer? Every prayer and request. Prayers may include declarations of praise and reverence to God. The term rendered request includes petitions and entreaties. The word intercession refers to praying for and on behalf of others.

What is the manner of our praying? We should be alert—that is, aware of the urgency of prayer and alert to the people and needs to be prayed for. Further, we should persist in prayer (with all perseverance). May we never lose confidence in the effectiveness of prayer!
For whom are we to pray? For all the saints, including ourselves. All believers are engaged in spiritual warfare, and therefore we are to pray for one another.

VERSE 19

Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.

Paul then asked for the Ephesian believers to pray for him in some specific ways. First, he asked them to pray that he might know exactly what God wanted him to say when he had an opportunity to preach the gospel message. Paul knew well the truths of the gospel and never wavered from them. He might—and often did—vary his approaches and emphases in presenting the gospel truths to better communicate with different audiences. Second, Paul asked the Ephesians to pray that he would be bold in proclaiming the mystery of the gospel. Even someone such as Paul had to battle with fear.

VERSE 20

For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.

One reason that Paul had to battle with fear likely had to do with his being a prisoner in Rome—an ambassador in chains. He was not free to travel; he could not even move about in Rome. On any given day, the emperor might decide that he could use Paul as a political pawn, perhaps even executing the apostle to pacify Paul’s enemies. Yet, Paul was an ambassador of the King of kings. Therefore, he pleaded with the Ephesians to intercede for him to be bold enough to speak about the gospel as he was called to do. May we pray for one another to have the same boldness in our lives as gospel witnesses!

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Prayer” on page 1291–1293 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How is prayer both a resource and a strategy in facing spiritual battles? In what ways do you need to strengthen your readiness for spiritual battles by strengthening your prayer life? How can you begin now?