Walking to Battle

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

Ephesians 6:10-20

We admire people who take on a challenge. The Bible is full of people who met challenges with courage and confidence. Elijah faced the prophets of Baal. David stood his ground in front of Goliath. Esther risked death to reveal Haman’s plot. Peter defied the order to stop preaching the gospel. Each of these people put their confidence in God and not solely in their own abilities. God prepared them and provided the resources for these defining moments, and He continues to do so for His followers today.

What are some of the reasons people run from a battle? Why would someone run to it?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

The first three chapters of Ephesians set forth great doctrinal truths about God, salvation, and the church. Chapters 4–6 spell out how believers should live in light of these great truths. First we learn about our new lives in Christ then we are taught a new walk in Christ. But this new walk does not come without struggle.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul has enlightened us about the lofty and high purposes of God. He has elevated the standard of behavior of believers. He has raised the bar concerning expectations in the home. But none of these noble objectives would come easy. They would involve, as Paul said, spiritual battles and warfare. Every high and holy expectation expressed by Paul—believers understanding their calling in Jesus, the church coming together as one, the proclamation of the gospel, pastors equipping saints for the work of ministry, and families reflecting the truth of the gospel—is at risk because of “the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

Paul concluded his letter with a farewell statement (6:21-24) that mentioned Tychicus, who most likely was a messenger of the apostle and delivered the letter to its recipients. While this beloved and steadfast brother was named, there are no other personal greetings in the farewell section. This most likely indicates that Paul intended the letter to be widely circulated. We can draw some conclusions from that. First, what Paul described in Ephesians is normative for believers and churches in every era. Today’s disciples can’t plead an exemption from its teachings simply because of cultural value shifts. Secondly, we can expect that spiritual warfare will always be part of the Christian experience. If anything, the diabolical attacks of the enemy will increase as we move closer to the consummation of all things in Jesus (1:10).

Identify the actions Paul instructed his readers to take in Ephesians 6:10-20. How does each action enable the believer to honor Christ?
AWARE (EPH. 6:10-13)

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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.

VERSE 10
The word finally is usually interpreted in the sense of “therefore,” as a conclusion drawn from what was said previously. But the phrase used by Paul in the original language can also mean “from this point forward.” The Christian life will always be a battle until the day we leave this earth or until Christ returns.

The battle in which believers engage is serious and significant, so it requires help from the Lord and his vast strength. Having mentioned this power previously (Eph. 1:19-20), Paul encouraged his readers to lay hold of and access this vital spiritual resource. Spiritual warfare is not a fight that we can win on our own. The verb used by Paul in the phrase be strengthened is in the passive voice, indicating that the subject is being acted upon, rather than doing the action.

VERSE 11
How do believers tap into the strength of the Lord for battle? We do so by putting on the full armor of God. There is no question Paul assumed the reality of the devil and his schemes to thwart the work of God. While the devil is a formidable enemy, we must always remember that he has been defeated at the cross of Jesus (1:22). He is powerful, but Jesus is all-powerful.

VERSE 12
Failure to understand the opponent can be disastrous in any area of life. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. Paul identified the true enemy of the believer as the devil himself. Christians often think their biggest struggles are with other people. The temptation
is to focus on the human expression or emissary of evil, failing to realize the spiritual forces behind it. Paul explained that our struggle is not against flesh and blood.

The real battle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. These are demonic forces under the direction of Satan. Paul’s point was not to provide an organizational chart of Satan’s evil empire but rather to remind us of the many forces at play in battle. Satan is cunning, well organized, and well equipped to inflict damage on those spiritual soldiers not prepared for warfare.

**BIBLE SKILL: Read passages related by theme.**

Read the following verses in their context and see what you can learn about God as warrior: Exodus 14:14,25; 15:3; Deuteronomy 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Joshua 10:25; 23:10; 1 Samuel 17:45; 2 Chronicles 20:17; Psalms 24:8; 35:1; 140:7; and Isaiah 42:13. What did you learn about spiritual warfare from these passages? How would they inspire you to put on your spiritual armor?

**VERSE 13**

The threat against us is great. For this reason take up the full armor of God. While denoting the completeness of the full armor, the main focus is on its divine origin. Paul’s very language is consistent with his entire message in Ephesians. This is not something we do for ourselves. God provides us with the resources we need to combat the dark forces that would diminish Christ in our lives. In this way we are able to resist against those evil attacks.

The phrase having prepared everything translates a compound word that indicates being prepared or equipped. The result of this...
preparation is the ability to take your stand. We dare not miss the connection between the two. Resisting temptation is not a matter of our own strength or resolve. Instead, the key is appropriating what God has prepared for us in the moral and spiritual battle that we must fight. This is illustrated in Moses’ encouragement to the people of Israel: “The LORD will fight for you” (Ex. 14:14) Having this perspective is crucial in order to gain victory over the evil one.

Why does it matter that believers in Christ clearly understand that their walk in Him includes facing spiritual conflict? What dangers exist if the believer fails to recognize the possibility of spiritual battles?

PREPARED (EPH. 6:14-17)

14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. 15 In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 16 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

VERSES 14-15

Paul identified for the Ephesians their armor (vv. 14-16) and weaponry (v. 17). The imperative to stand is connected with all of the pieces of armor listed. The order of their appearance in the text is likely the order in which a Roman soldier would have put them on. Of course, regardless of how impressive armor might look hanging in the barracks, it was of no value unless it was put on. Believers must take advantage of the resources provided by God.

As mentioned earlier, there is an emphasis on the divine origin of this armor. This is most appropriate to remember when it comes to the first two protective pieces, truth and righteousness. Both come from God, not ourselves. Ever the student of the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul seemed to have Isaiah 11:5 in mind while writing these words.

The belt that surrounded the waist held the armor in place. A tightly fitted belt indicated the soldier was prepared for action. A slackened belt indicated he was off duty. The truth that holds every piece of armor in place is the gospel.
Righteousness as **armor on your chest** denotes protection at our most vital and vulnerable places. Righteous living closes doors to temptation and to the schemes of the devil. But righteous living is possible only by the gift of righteousness given through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

Good footwear was vital to the success of the soldier because he traveled many miles to battle. He also traveled tough terrain. The sandals represented readiness or preparedness of the soldier. What was the soldier prepared to do? He was prepared to announce **the gospel of peace**.

**VERSE 16**

A Roman soldier’s **shield** was oblong and covered most of the body. This imagery seems appropriate in light of the role of **faith** in all of our Christian experience, not just the inception of our new lives. As with righteousness mentioned previously, there is an objective and subjective aspect to faith. There is the Christian faith on which we are to stand and believe. Yet there is also personal faith, the trust an individual places in Christ to save and deliver. Both are necessary in spiritual warfare.

What did Paul mean when he wrote about **the flaming arrows of the evil one**? These might include accusations of conscience or false guilt, along with other thoughts of disobedience. The main point is that Satan attacks believers but faith extinguishes those destructive attacks.

**VERSE 17**

Isaiah 59:17 paints a picture of the coming Savior who took on a **helmet of salvation**. This is a helpful reminder that the spiritual resources that we appropriate are found with the Lord and not simply within ourselves. This salvation is what Paul has described in 1:3-14 and 2:1-10. As a helmet, the knowledge of salvation protects us from believing the enemy’s lies.

The offensive weapon in our arsenal, **the sword of the Spirit**, is **the word of God**. The word for **sword** used by Paul is that of a short sword used in close combat. The best example of its usage is Christ’s use of Scripture in His wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:1-10). In spiritual warfare we must use the Word of God. Disaster awaits any believer who would try to contend with temptation by using ideas from best-selling books instead of the truths found in Scripture.
What might keep a believer from utilizing the armor God provides for fighting spiritual battles? What responsibility do we have in preparing for spiritual battle?

**VERSE 18**

In addition to armor and weapons, the soldier has at his disposal field support. Our first level of field support is prayer. The wise soldier sharpens his prayer life before the battle even arrives. Both preparation and engagement in battle require prayer.

The prayer by which we equip ourselves and engage in battle has several characteristics. First, it is consistent. We are instructed to *pray at all times*. In every situation we need to be found praying. Paul characterized this as praying with *all perseverance*. Secondly, it is offered *in the Spirit*. The grammar of the original language emphasizes that the Spirit is the means by which prayer is offered. The Spirit is with the person praying, inspires the person to pray, guides the person in what to pray, and energizes him or her to keep praying.

Finally, this prayer is offered sincerely and from one’s innermost being. The construction of Paul’s command, *with every prayer and request*, is striking. The meaning is that when we pray, we should really pray. It is possible to go through the motions of praying.
without “really” praying. Perfunctory, half-hearted prayers are insufficient when it comes to spiritual warfare.

Closely connected with the command to pray is the imperative to **stay alert**. The wording of verse 18 seems to put these two commands in parallel structure. Another way of saying this is that to pray is to stay alert and staying alert allows us to pray. We are reminded of Jesus’ admonition to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion to “stay awake and pray so that you won’t enter into temptation” (Mark 14:38).

Our prayers are to be characterized by **intercession**, which means to pray on someone’s behalf. The question is how wide the scope of our intercessory prayer extends. I was challenged once by a speaker who asked, “How often do you pray for someone who doesn’t share the same last name as you?” We tend to pray for our family members and close friends, yet we are instructed to pray for **all the saints**.

**VERSES 19-20**

While we pray as part of our own spiritual warfare, we also pray for others who are engaging in spiritual battles. Paul’s request, **pray also for me**, is an example of this. Specifically, he requested prayer that **the message may be given** to him and that he might preach **with boldness the mystery of the gospel**. This is more than just a request for personal confidence, which any human speaker or teacher might desire.

Paul’s passion to take the gospel to the lost is obvious in verses 19-20. An **ambassador** lives in a foreign land but represents his home country. Paul saw himself as a stranger in the places he traveled to take the gospel, and he desired to deliver the message of the kingdom of God. Though he was an ambassador, he was in battle. He was in **chains** for preaching the gospel. Paul asked for prayer that God would grant him boldness to speak of Jesus even in the heat of battle.

*How does knowing others are praying help a person face spiritual battles?*

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IN MY CONTEXT

- God provides all the resources needed for believers to prevail in spiritual battles.
- Believers must prepare themselves for spiritual battle.
- Believers must depend upon God through prayer for victory.

What actions can you take to increase your confidence in the sufficiency of God’s resources for spiritual warfare?

What spiritual battles are you currently facing? What needs to be “put on” to face these battles?

Discuss as a group ways your group can help one another fight spiritual battles. What needs to be implemented or strengthened based on this discussion? How?

Prayer Needs