



Dressing For Victory

A Mantour Ministries Bible Study

*James J. Holden
with Adessa Holden*

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With Adessa Holden

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Introduction

“It’s not like I go around looking for it, but I realize it’s a part of life that has to be recognized and properly addressed.”

This was the answer a friend gave my sister when she dared to bring the topic of spiritual warfare into a conversation. I have to admit, I cringed when Adessa broached the subject with her. Not that I don’t believe in spiritual warfare, I do. I just know a lot of people don’t want to hear about it. However, when I heard the women’s reply to my sister, I breathed a sigh of relief because I knew listening to her story that the conflicts and dilemmas she was describing had more to them than initially met the eye. Having experience and training in spiritual warfare, I recognized that she was not fighting against flesh and blood, but rather, there was a spiritual battle involved.

Adessa told me she also could feel her heart pounding as she felt the Holy Spirit prompting her to point her friend in this direction. To be honest, she was scared. Like me, she kept thinking, “What if she thinks I’m a nut job? What if she doesn’t believe in spiritual warfare or the suggestion of it freaks her out?”

Still, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, Adessa shared with her that she felt her friend needed to start looking at the situation through spiritual eyes and using the spiritual weapons God had given her to fight what was truly a spiritual battle. They continued talking about what this meant for her specifically, prayed, and went on their way. To be honest, for the rest of the day, Adessa and I both wondered whether her friend heard what she said, thought we were ‘spiritual fanatics’, or even took her advice.

Because we’re both busy people, we didn’t hear the conclusion of that chapter in the story for a few days. That’s when Adessa’s friend told her that even though spiritual warfare wasn’t something she went looking for, she absolutely believed that it existed and that as Christians we need to be prepared to fight the spiritual battles that come our way. Then she told her how much the situation had changed after their first conversation where they prayed and used their spiritual weapons to take control of the

situation. When they chose to fight against their spiritual enemies using the weapons of our spiritual warfare, she began to see the victory.

Looking back on the incident, I'm glad that my sister made the choice to follow the Holy Spirit and speak truth into her friend's life. Of course, I'm also a little ashamed that it was such a struggle for me when she did it. The truth is that the topic of spiritual warfare shouldn't be such a taboo topic among Christians. It should be common place---as common as getting dressed in the morning.

Ephesians 6: 10-11 says "Finally, 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."

Why do I say that spiritual warfare should be as common to us as getting dressed in the morning? Because in this Scripture, Paul tells us that each day we are to "Put on" the full armor of God so that we can stand against the devil's evil schemes.

What exactly does this mean and how can we practically apply it to our lives?

That's what we're going to talk about in this new Bible Study "Dressing for Victory".

Reality is that there is more to this world than the tangible things that we can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. These things belong to the physical world. However, beyond that world is the spiritual world. In the spirit world, there is a constant and ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil—God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom.

As Ephesians 6:12 says, "*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.*"

You cannot say that you believe the Bible and not believe in spiritual warfare. It's impossible.

The fact is that there is a war between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom is a fundamental truth of the Bible. Every book of the New Testament mentions demons, evil angels, or Satan. If you claim to be a Christian who believes the Bible is the infallible Word of God, you must accept the fact that the war between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom exists. Furthermore, you must accept that you are a part of that battle.

This is where it gets murky. You see, there are many Christians who don't want to be in a battle. Spiritually, they are pacifists. They don't like war and they don't want to participate. Unfortunately, the enemy, Satan, has deceived them into thinking that they have an option. However, nothing is further from the truth.

The truth is that no human being has an option of whether or not they are involved in the spiritual war. If you are a human being with an eternal soul, there is a battle raging for your soul and your eternal destiny. Just like a baby born in Israel doesn't get to choose whether they want to be in a war with the surrounding countries, so you don't get to choose whether or not you are in a war. An Israeli baby is born into a warzone. Even before he's taken his first steps or spoken his first word, he has enemies that hate him. He doesn't get a choice. It's a fact of his life.

If you claim to be a Christian who believes the Bible is the infallible Word of God, you must accept the fact that the war between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom exists. Furthermore, you must accept that you are a part of that battle.

In the same way, every human being is born into a spiritual warzone. We don't get to choose whether or not we are in a spiritual battle. The fact is that we are. The only two choices that you have are:

1. Are you on God's side or Satan's side?
2. Are you going to "put on" the weapons God has given you to fight and gain victory or are you going to run around the spiritual battlefield naked and unprotected?

Let's assume that anyone who is reading this article has chosen to be on God's side. You made that decision when you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior and became a Christian. At that point, you transferred your allegiance from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God.

Having made that decision, Satan now sees you as a traitor and he hates you. Anyone who has accepted Jesus as their Savior and joined God's army is the enemies #1 target. He wants nothing more than to destroy your life, your relationship with God, your family, your testimony, and your reputation. He will use every weapon at his disposal to try to destroy you.

The good news is that *"the One Who is in you (Jesus) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan)."* (1 John 4:4)

Isaiah 54:17 says, "No weapon forged against you will prevail,"

Ultimately, God is in control of the universe. He is far more powerful than Satan. As we see in the first chapter of Job, Satan can only wage war against people to the point that God allows it. Because of this, we do not have to be afraid.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

Still, one truth that Christians need to accept is that God will allow Satan to attack Christians so that Christians will learn to fight. Through these battles, we will mature spiritually, grow deeper in our relationship with God, and win other people to Christ.

As 1 Peter 1:7 says, *"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

In his book, “Fight”, Kenny Luck said, *“We are the reason God didn’t nuke Satan from the get-go. It’s not that He couldn’t. It’s because there were larger considerations. One of them was us—His future sons and daughters.*

In this time between one eternity and the next comes the age of men and the battle against evil on the earth. It seems like a long time, but it’s not, sandwiched as it is between the two halves of forever.

Had God obliterated Satan, He could never have created another being as magnificent as Lucifer, able to be seated with God in heaven, possessing a will to worship but never a will to rebel. That creation is you. God is permitting evil to have limited success now so that out of this age will come sons who are able to share His glory but not attach to it like Satan did.”

In short, God allows the battle for our good, so that we will be conformed to the image of His Son, recognize we are nothing without Him, and be prepared for eternity. Even though God could remove all battles from our lives, He won’t. He wants us to learn to fight.

So that’s the reality of the situation:

There is a spiritual battle. We’re in it.

Satan, our enemy hates us and wants to use all means possible to destroy us.

God will allow these attacks and battles to come our way so that we grow spiritually.

This brings us to our second choice, “Are you going to choose to “put on” the spiritual armor that God has given you or are you going to be a wimpy, defeated victim that falls into every trap the enemy sets for you?

This is where the rubber meets the road.

You see, when we choose not to wear our spiritual armor and use the weapons God has given us to live in victory, when we choose to ignore the fact that there is a spiritual war going on around us, we are choosing to lose the battle.

Worse yet, when we choose to believe that there is no spiritual battle, thus there's no need for us to "put on" the armor of God, we are disobeying God and the Bible. You see, as Christians we aren't given the option of whether or not to use our spiritual weapons and fight. No, if we continue reading on in Ephesians 6:13-17 we read:

"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. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Not one sentence in that verse says, "If you want to" or "If you feel like it". These are imperative sentences commanding us to use these weapons to win the spiritual battles in our lives.

Okay, it's clear that we are in a battle. It's also pretty clear that we need to choose to put on the armor God has given us so that we won't be defeated. The next question is: Exactly how do we do that?

What exactly does Paul mean by the "belt of truth" or the "helmet of salvation"? How do I apply this teaching to my real life?

For many years there was a teaching in the church that all you had to do was get up every morning and read this Scripture saying, "I choose to put on the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, etc..." As you got dressed you would be choosing to put on the armor of God as well.

Although I'm not criticizing this practice, and may even think it has some validity, it still seems like there has to be more to it. I'm sure the Apostle Paul meant

for us to do more than just recite a few words each morning. Practically applying this principle must involve a change of heart and the choice to make these spiritual virtues a part of our life, wearing them just as we wear a suit of clothes each day.

That's what we're going to explore in our new Bible Study, "Dressing for Victory". One by one, we're going to study each article of clothing in our spiritual armor and talk about how we can "put it on" spiritually. Together, we'll challenge each other to be men who live in victory and overcome the attacks of the enemy. Rather than being weak men who run from the battle, we'll choose to be empowered men who not only acknowledge that the battle exists, but are willing to fight for victory in our own lives and the lives of our family and friends. I hope you'll join us on this new journey as we become men who "Dress for Victory".

Chapter 1

Choosing to Wear the Belt of Truth

Did you ever have one of those days where you get up in the morning and couldn't decide what to wear? Should I put on the pants that make me look professional or the pants that make me feel comfortable?

Should I wear a tie?

What color do I feel like wearing all day long?

I'm sure we've all had days where we spend way too much of our valuable morning time trying to choose which articles of clothing we are going to put on and wear. The interesting thing is that even though many men spend time making a conscious decision about what clothes they are going to wear, we don't spend as much time choosing which attitudes and mindsets we are going to put on for the same day.

Often, even though we understand the concept of "dressing for success" in the physical world; we don't carry that same aggressive thinking into "dressing for success" in the spiritual world. Yet, the Apostle Paul encourages us in Ephesians 6:11 to daily put on the full armor of God---to choose to "put on" the attitudes and behaviors that make up God's armor---so that we can successful stand against the enemy's evil schemes to destroy our spiritual and physical lives.

Last month, we answered the question, "*What's the big deal about wearing the full armor of God?*" *This month, we're going to move on and take at our first look at the individual pieces of the armor of God that we are commanded to "Put On" each day. So let's open our Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-14 and talk about "The Buckle of Truth".*

“Finally, 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,”

Okay, to really understand this Scripture, we need to think of the buckle or girdle as it pertains to a suit of armor, not as an accessory that give us a nice waistline. In his book, “Victory in Spiritual Warfare”, Dr. Tony Evans explains that a Roman soldier’s belt had three purposes:

1. It was a place where some of his other armor could hang. He might hang his sword on his belt. He might also hang a dagger there or any number of needed items.
2. A soldier would use it to gain greater freedom in movement. When the soldier was ready to head into battle, he could reach down and pick up the part of his tunic that was draping near his feet and tuck it in this belt. If you’ve ever seen a movie that takes place in the Roman era, you’ve seen that the men frequently dressed in long robes. You’ve probably also noticed when it got time to get serious with work or move into battle, the Roman soldier would lift his robe and tuck it underneath his belt. By doing this, he was given greater freedom to move his feet.
3. The belt produced stability by holding things in place....a belt stabilizes whatever else we are wearing. (pg 55)

When the Apostle Paul compares truth to a belt, he is saying that choosing to wear truth each day will be like a Roman soldier choosing to wear his belt when he goes into battle. Just as the Roman soldier’s belt provides him with the benefits of freedom, stability, and a place to keep his other weapons, so truth will provide us with a foundation on which the other parts of our spiritual armor can rest, freedom, and stability that keeps things in their proper order.

As the commentator Albert Barnes says, *“The idea here may be, that as the girdle was the bracer up, or support of the body, so truth is suited to brace us up, and to gird us for constancy and firmness. The girdle kept all the parts of the armor in their*

proper place, and preserved firmness and consistency in the dress; and so truth might serve to give consistency and firmness to our conduct.” (www.e-sword.net)

So, why is it so important that we put on truth every day?

Well, truth is the foundational garment that holds everything else in its proper place. Truth is consistent---it never changes. Therefore, it has a stabilizing effect on our lives. Also, because choosing to put on truth puts everything else into its proper perspective and keeps it there, when we live in truth, we will live in freedom. *As John 8:32 says, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

So, if you want to live a life that is free from the bondage of sin, you have to “put on truth”.

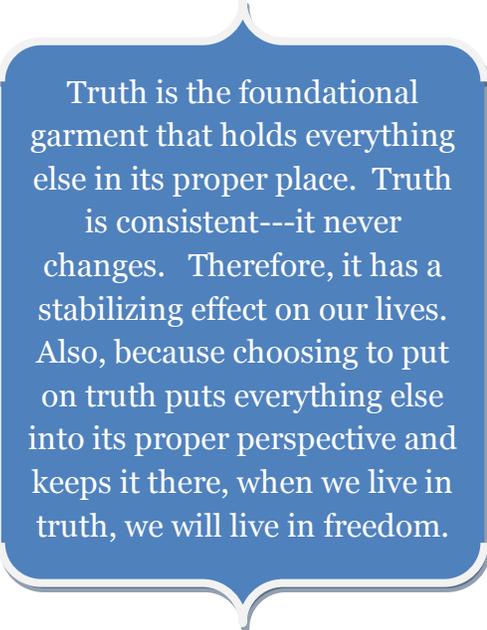
If you want peace and stability in your life, rather than being tossed along by every new idea, emotion or fad that comes along, you need to choose to “Put on truth.”

Ultimately, if you want to successfully overcome the spiritual attacks of the enemy on your life, you’ve got to start with the foundation of choosing to live each and every day walking in, believing, and wearing truth.

Which leads us to the question: What is truth and how do I choose to put it on? (I love this part, because it’s where we get practical.)

Truth means the opposite of false. It has the sense of valid, reliable, and honest. Truth is a representation of things as they are---true to fact, conforming to reality, factual.

It seems like a simple definition---the opposite of lies; however, living in a culture that is filled with lies makes truth a critical feature of our spiritual wardrobe. It’s the foundational garment that holds everything else together.



Truth is the foundational garment that holds everything else in its proper place. Truth is consistent---it never changes. Therefore, it has a stabilizing effect on our lives. Also, because choosing to put on truth puts everything else into its proper perspective and keeps it there, when we live in truth, we will live in freedom.

Everywhere we look, we are surrounded with lies. Each day, the plethora of entertainment outlets available to us speaks lies in our minds about what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Constantly, we are lied to about what is normal, what is healthy, and what is socially acceptable. We're told lies like:

God did not create the world; we are all the product of evolution.

All roads lead to Heaven. Christianity is only one of many religions, all leading to the same place.

You must be tolerant and accepting of all religions, never telling anyone that their religion is wrong.

We must be tolerant and acceptable of all lifestyles. People have choices and there is no such thing as sin.

Even within some churches, we are told to compromise our standards of morality in the spirit of tolerance.

However, all of these statements are lies.

There are absolutes.

There is only One True God Who created the world and is still in control of it. He sent His One and Only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross and redeem mankind from their sins. He is the One and Only Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The Bible is God's Word. It speaks ultimate truth. Within its pages, sin is clearly defined. So is the path to salvation. Those who choose to accept Jesus as their Savior will spend eternity with Him. Those who reject Him will spend eternity in Hell. Although these may sound like harsh realities, they are reality.

As Christians, we need to keep these fundamental truths of our faith in the forefront of our minds, and not allow ourselves to be deceived by the lies of a culture that tells us otherwise. When we lose sight of these truths and allow lies to put us into a state of spiritual anesthesia, we lose the very essence of who we are as Christians. We stop being light in a dark world, because we're more comfortable blending in.

These truths are the basis for our life and they define our purpose and our calling on this earth. They are what drive us to abandon ourselves, follow God wholeheartedly and do our part to fulfill the Great Commission. No wonder our enemy is working overtime trying to get us to replace these truths with lies! It is up to us to choose whether we will believe lies or truth.

In his book, "Fight", Kenny Luck says, "*There are two forces alone that shape and influence the hearts of men: truth and lies. Whatever wins the battle for a man's heart wins the battle for his character. The character of a man drives his conduct...That conduct will create health and life or sickness and death for those around him.*" (Page 222-223)

When we lose sight of these truths and allow lies to put us into a state of spiritual anesthesia, we lose the very essence of who we are as Christians.

You see, it's very, very easy to get sucked into the culture of lies. For instance, a few months ago, my sister and I were going through a very difficult time. When the end of the day arrived, it was easy to crash in front of the television and watch a popular comedy that propagated many of these lies. Honestly, it was a really funny show and it took our minds off of the stressful situations in our own lives. Night after night, we compromised and allowed our minds to dwell on lies disguised as sarcastic humor.

Then one night, Adessa had a terrible nightmare. In the dream, someone she was very close to was openly tolerating games of witchcraft. She woke up completely livid thinking, "They better not fool around with things like that!"

Then the Holy Spirit said to her, "You're the one who's fooling around with things like that by watching a comedy where people joke about these types of games."

When she told me this, it was like someone hit me between the eyes! Like the frog who didn't realize he was being cooked for soup because the temperature of the pot was rising slowly, I didn't realize that I was giving ground to the lie that the lifestyle of the people on television was normal. Quickly, I repented and that was the end of that show!

This is just one of the techniques that our enemy, the devil, uses to hold Christians captive to lies. Another of his popular tactics is causing us focus on and believe lies about ourselves.

"You'll never amount to anything."

"You're not worth anything more than an abusive relationship."

"Who do you think you are to believe that God has an amazing plan for your future after what you've done in the past?"

Just as you can choose what clothes you put on in the morning, you can choose to 'put on truth' by making a conscious effort to replace the lies that play like videotape through your mind with the truth that God speaks in His Word about you.

Like videotape, we replay these words spoken to us by other people---parents, teachers, friends, former spouses or girlfriends, co-workers---over and over again in our minds. As we replay the episodes over and over again, they become ingrained into our minds and control our lives. Sadly, there are men reading this article that have been held in captivity for ten, twenty, thirty years or more by LIES that were spoken to them or about them.

However, it doesn't have to be this way. Just as you can choose what clothes you put on in the morning, you can choose to 'put on truth' by making a conscious effort to replace the lies that play like videotape through your mind with the truth that God speaks in His Word about you.

Rather than focusing on the lie that you are worthless, you need to think about and focus on the truth of *1 Thessalonians 1:4* "For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you."

Instead of listening to the lie that you aren't capable, think about *Philippians 4:13*, "*I can do all this through Him Who gives me strength.*"

Rather than believing the lie that you have no future, quote *Jeremiah 29:11*, "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*"

Both lies and truth are powerful tools, each carrying the power of life and death. The amazing thing is that both are within your reach. The choice is yours: will you believe the lies you've been told or the truth in God's Word? The life that hangs in the balance is your own, and the determining factor is whether you choose to "put on" lies or truth. If you want to choose life, you will need to make the conscious choice to obey Paul's command and put on the truth.

One final trap that Satan has been using on Christians has a twist of irony to it. Unfortunately, it's been quite a successful tactic. Here it is: He's deceiving people with the lie that lying is no big deal. Again, He's using the media and popular entertainment to accomplish his dirty deed.

Think about it: how many times have you been exposed to a form of entertainment that uses comedy to spread the message that lying is no big deal--- everybody does it? How often do we watch people lying, cheat, steal, and betray each other without getting caught while we laugh at each punch line?

Unfortunately, the joke is on us. As we watch, our consciences slowly becoming duller and duller toward lying. Soon we believe that lying is no big deal as long as no one gets hurt. Next, we convince ourselves that it's okay to lie to keep someone from getting hurt. Ultimately, lying becomes a regular part of our lives and the result is that lots of people get hurt.

As I know from the personal experience of living with a father who called himself a Christian but had a major problem with lying, it is a big deal. It steals, destroys, and kills families, relationships and reputations. It isn't funny, and the repercussions aren't all wrapped up in 30 minutes. That may be the lie that Hollywood wants to portray, but

reality is that when trust is lost, it takes years to get back---if it can ever be fully regained. If we want to live happy, stable, peaceful lives we need to choose to put on truth each and every day and completely avoid the temptation to lie.

What are some other practical ways we can put on truth? In the book, “Fight” Kenny Luck defines a “person of truth” as one who is:

- able to be honest with God
- able to be honest with yourself
- able to be honest with others
- teachable in the face of uncomfortable truth
- good with reality, not afraid of it
- good at meeting the demands of reality and changing accordingly
- desiring to use truth as compass for decision making
- marinating in God’s truth in the Bible
- proactively applying truth when it’s discovered
- seeking out people of truth to keep you accountable
- taking responsibility (page 223)

As we said before, truth is the opposite of lies. It’s a small definition, but it speaks volumes. When Paul commands us to “gird up our loins with truth” he is actually commanding us to make a conscious choice to abandon lies and live in truth. That means that each day we choose God’s truth over the lies that there is no truth. It means we choose to believe what God’s Word says about us rather than believing the lies we’ve been told throughout our lives. Obviously, putting on truth means choosing to speak truth in all situations and commit to the requirements for being a person of truth.

You see, it's like we said last month. It's one thing to get up each morning and say a recite the verse, "I put on the buckle of truth". It's another thing to actually wear truth, to live in it and walk in it every hour and every minute of that day. Yet, if we are going to live our spiritual lives in victory, we're going to have to do more than just look at the spiritual clothes that are available to us like we look at the clothing choices in our closet. We need to take the next step and choose to "put on truth" and live in truth. That's the first step to Dressing for Victory---choosing to "put on truth".

Kenny Luck "Fight" Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, Co, 2008

Dr. Tony Evans "Victory in Spiritual Warfare", Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2011

www.e-sword.com

Chapter 2

Choosing to Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness

Have you ever thought about the increase in spiritual warfare that accompanies seasons of celebration?

Well, you're not alone, because most people don't think about it. Most of us like to think that the forces of good and evil take a vacation starting the night before Thanksgiving and stay away until the day after the New Year or whenever else we're celebrating a special occasion with our friends and families. Unfortunately, this isn't reality.

Instead, the increased activities, stress, opportunities for compromising with sin, and interaction with relatives who have not overcome their generational iniquities increases the spiritual activity Christians face during these times. That's why it's important that we pay attention to more than what festive attire we're going to wear to special events. As we're getting dressed we need to remember to "*put on*" the full armor of God. After all, even during these times we need to "*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" (1 Peter 5:8)

Even though this may not be a "happy and joyful" thought, seasons of celebration are not the time to abandon our spiritual armor and venture out into the world naked and unarmed. Instead, we need to be aware of the spiritual bombs that are waiting to be detonated all around us, and be prepared to detonate them using our spiritual weapons before they cause a big explosion.

Not sure what I'm talking about? Here are a few examples:

Let's say you're at a holiday function surrounded by your entire family. Everyone is there with the intentions of having a good, memorable time, but there's no getting away from the fact that there are little landmines of generational iniquities, unaddressed emotional wounds from the past, and personality conflicts just waiting to go off. Like little pieces of dynamite, any one of these explosives could create enormous chaos if they came in contact with a spark. If we look at this situation through spiritual eyes, we can see that the entire environment is ripe for a spiritual attack. But what can you do about it?

Well, you can arrive dressed in your spiritual armor of Truth, Righteousness, and Peace. By choosing to "put on" these behaviors you can deflect any attacks that might come against you. Perhaps your actions could even detonate a few bombs before they go off and cause an explosion.

On the other hand, if you're not wearing your spiritual armor, you'll have nothing to protect you from the wrong word, action or innuendo. Instead of deflecting off of you, this weapon of destruction could pierce right into your heart or mind, setting off the same destructive patterns that have continued on in your family for years. By the time the evening is over, you or your family could have been devoured by the enemy because you weren't sober and vigilante, and didn't choose to "*Put On*" the right attitudes and actions.

Let's look at another scenario:

Let's say you're at an office party. You didn't spiritually prepare yourself by deciding ahead of time that you would "Put On" Truth, Righteousness, Peace, and the Other Spiritual Weapons. Instead, you've decided to just "go with the flow".

Well, the "flow" of the party is definitely headed in some ungodly directions. Before long, you've done some things that have tarnished your reputation as a Christian and a professional.

As you look back afterwards you think, "How did that happen? How did I end up devouring the witness I've tried to uphold all year long?" The only answer you'll be able

to come up with is that you weren't sober and vigilant. You didn't look for the enemy to attack you with temptation, and you weren't prepared to defend yourself or fight. Ultimately, you lost the battle because you walked naked into a warzone rather than dressed for victory.

You were defeated because you didn't face the reality that spiritual warfare doesn't take a break, and we need to be prepared and dressed for victory at all times---in season and out.

This brings us to one of the most vital weapons in our spiritual armor. It's the piece of spiritual armor that you never want to leave home without---the breastplate of righteousness. Paul introduces it to us in Ephesians 6:10-14:

“Finally, 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,”

What is a breastplate?

“It is the armor that covered the body from the neck to the thighs, and consisted of two parts, one covering the front and the other the back. It was made of rings, or in the form of scales, or of plates, so fastened together that they would be flexible, and yet guard the body from a sword, spear, or arrow.” (Barnes Notes on the New Testament, www.e-sword.com)

The breastplate is a key component in any soldier's armor. It covered the torso and protected vital organs like the heart, lungs, and kidneys. If a soldier was shot with either a gun or an arrow and he wasn't wearing his breastplate, the attack would most likely be fatal. However, if he was wearing his breastplate, the very same attack would be deflected, saving his life. Obviously, this was an essential piece of equipment!

It's interesting that Paul, knowing the important role that the breastplate played in the life of a soldier, taught that a Christian's breastplate is "righteousness". This brings us to the question of "What is righteousness?"

Righteousness simply means being or doing what is right.

Integrity. Holiness. Purity of life. Sincerity of piety.

We all pretty much get the idea. But what does it mean to "*Put on Righteousness?*"

This is where confusion sets in for many Christians because there are two types of righteousness: The type we get from Jesus when we are saved, and the righteousness that we put on as we are daily moving forward in the process of sanctification. Many Christians read this verse and believe that they are fully protected by Christ's righteousness; therefore, they don't have to worry about "putting on" their own. They think that this piece of armor is a no-brainer---once you're saved, you've got the breastplate of righteousness---now let's move on.

Unfortunately, this isn't exactly how it works. In his book, "Victory in Spiritual Warfare", Dr. Tony Evans explains the difference between the two types of righteousness and clarifies the Christian's responsibility. He says:

"There are two sides to righteousness---the being side and the doing side. Righteousness has been imputed to everyone who has trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins....Imputing righteousness can be compared to God crediting your account, or putting money in your bank. The money now belongs to you. No one can take that money away from you....Once you are saved, Satan can do nothing to change your righteous standing---your justification---before God.

However, because Satan cannot take away your imputed righteousness, what he tries to do is restrict your personal practice of righteousness. He knows he can't take away your standing before God, so he looks for a way to break your fellowship with God by causing a breach between your position of righteousness and your practice of righteousness." (pg. 68)

It's essential that we understand the difference between imputed righteousness and our personal practice of righteousness before we can put on the "breastplate of

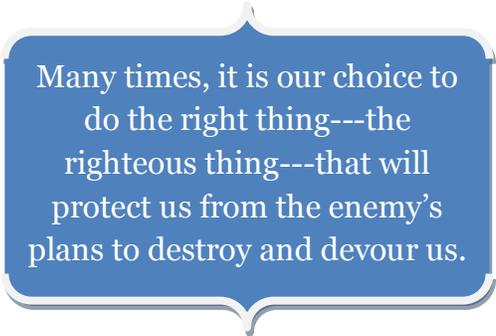
righteousness” so that we can understand that the “righteousness” that Paul tells us to “put on” each day is not the “imputed righteousness” that comes from Jesus.

The imputed righteousness of Jesus is like our skin---it’s a part of us---there’s no putting it on and taking it off. Quite honestly, the imputed righteousness of Jesus will do very little to help us fight or win any spiritual battles that might come our way.

On the other hand, whether or not we choose to “put on” the practice of right living each day will play an enormous role in whether we walk away from a spiritual battle victorious or devoured. Why?

Simply put: The #1 way a Christian invites demonic activity into their lives is by tolerating sin in their lives. It’s like an invitation to the enemy saying, “Come and devour me.”

This is why it is so important that a Christian makes a conscience decision each and every day that they will choose to abandon sin in their lives and live a righteous life. In fact, many times, it is our choice to do the right thing---the righteous thing---that will protect us from the enemy’s plans to destroy and devour us.



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Again for an example, let’s look at our two prior examples and see how choosing to put on righteousness could protect us from the potential attacks of the enemy. Let’s start with the family gathering.

When we last left the scene, we were talking about the potential for hidden explosives all around the gathering: sibling rivalry, unresolved issues, and generational iniquities everywhere. But what would happen if you wore your “Breastplate of Righteousness” to the party?

What potential explosives could be detonated if you chose to respond in love and forgiveness rather than hate and anger?

What if you decided to turn the other cheek when provoked or return a kind word for a “loaded” sentence?

What if you chose to humbly let your “sibling rival” go ahead of you without expecting any thanks in return?

What if you handled yourself in a righteous manner during the entire party?

Could you imagine the response you’d get?

Can you imagine what it would feel like to walk away from the gathering knowing that you’d handled yourself like a victorious Christian rather than falling into the same old traps of the enemy and allowing him to devour you and your holidays?

Are you starting to see the correlation between winning the battle spiritually and your decision to “put on” the practice of righteousness in all situations?

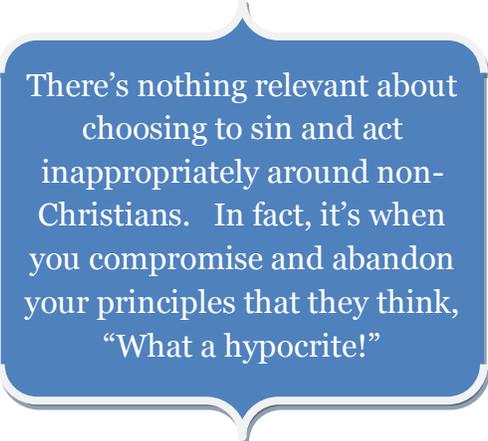
What about the office party?

What if you decided before you ever stepped foot on the property in the morning that you were going to conduct yourself in a righteous manner no matter what anyone else did or what peer pressure came your way?

What if you attended, but politely said, “No thank you” when the drinks were passed around or excused yourself when the jokes became inappropriate?

Even as I’m typing this, I can hear some people arguing, “But I don’t want to come off as a self-righteous hypocrite. I want to be relevant so that I can win the lost.”

Let me give it to you straight: There’s nothing relevant about choosing to sin and act inappropriately around non-Christians. In fact, it’s when you compromise and abandon your principles that they think, “What a hypocrite!”



There’s nothing relevant about choosing to sin and act inappropriately around non-Christians. In fact, it’s when you compromise and abandon your principles that they think, “What a hypocrite!”

The truth is that non-Christians expect Christians to act differently. They expect us to be real people who choose to do what is right. If you call yourself a Christian, then you'd better back it up with your behavior. Otherwise, you're not only allowing the enemy to wreck spiritual havoc in your life, but you're giving the enemy a prime opportunity to come in and steal any seeds of the truth of salvation that have been planted in their lives when they look at you and say, "Christianity doesn't seem to have changed them at all...What's the point?"

You see, this isn't a game that we're playing. Spiritual warfare is real. There's a very real enemy that's greatest desire is to destroy you, your family, your relatives, your friends, your co-workers, and anyone else who is influenced by your life. It's your responsibility as a child of God to choose to put on your spiritual armor everyday and fight. Fight for your spiritual victory and for the spiritual victory of everyone around you.

It's your responsibility to take it seriously and realize that whether or not you choose to put on righteousness will have a powerful effect not only on your soul, but on the souls of other people.

Life and death, Heaven and Hell, and spiritual warfare don't take a holiday. As an agent of life and Heaven, you can't take a holiday from wearing your spiritual armor and fighting your spiritual battles either. It's something you must choose to do each and every day---even during seasons of celebration.

That's why each day, before you leave the house or even before you get out of bed in the morning, you need to decide what you are going to wear. It's up to you to choose to dress for victory and put on the full armor of God so that you can withstand the enemy's traps. Then go out into the world completely dressed and fully prepared to enjoy your life, your family, your friends and all of your seasons of celebration wearing your Breastplate of Righteousness.

Chapter 3

Choosing to Wear the Shoes of Peace

“Self-control is the ability to resist taking the bait no matter how many times you are provoked.”

At least that’s what I keep telling myself over and over again.

You see, I don’t know about you, but I have several people in my life who are always trying to steal my peace. They are constantly trying to stir things up, and create a conflict or a point of tension because that’s where they are comfortable.

They run on the adrenaline that comes with drama. It’s like a drug to them. Needing the rush they get from it, they tend to create drama in every situation in life.

As odd as it may seem, these people thrive on conflict---it’s their comfort zone---the place where they feel warm and cozy and safe. Really, it’s sad because the root of the problem is that they’ve spent so much of their time playing the role of the bully or the victim that this is normal to them. Peace and harmony is unfamiliar, scary territory. So whenever things start to become too peaceful or people start to get too close, they start looking to escape by causing a conflict or creating a dramatic situation.

Once everything is chaotic again, they feel secure and in control of the situation. I guess you can say that these people feel calm when everyone else is at war.

It's strange, I know. Still, I find myself encountering people like this all the time. If you think about it, I'd be willing to bet that you're familiar with these types of people, too.

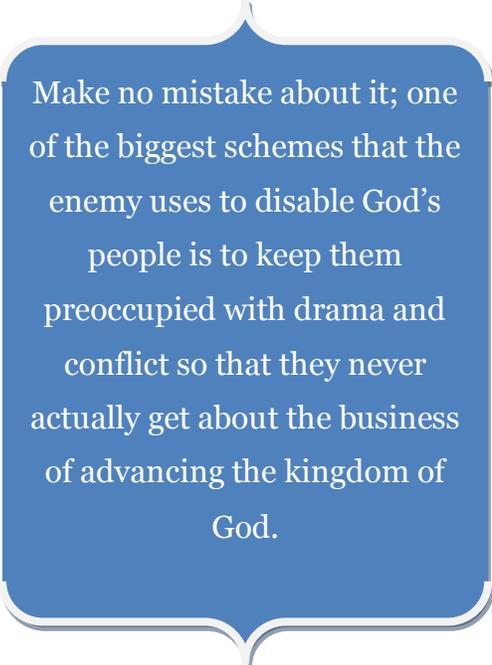
How do I know? Well, unfortunately, there are far too many people who struggle with issues from their past that cause them to consciously or unconsciously respond to life's circumstances in this way. In our families, at our jobs, within our social spheres, and even within the church, there are many people who are only comfortable in chaos and conflict, drama, and division. Like a magnet, they draw confusion to themselves. Like a super-powered vacuum they try to suck everyone around them into their melodrama, eliminating peace and propagating war.

If you've ever experienced this, you know exactly what I'm describing. In fact, right now you're probably picturing someone in your mind that constantly seems to be trying to involve you in their latest drama or conflict, and you're wondering, "How can I keep myself from constantly being sucked in, losing my peace, and having their drama control my life?"

Well, I believe that the answer can be found in Ephesians 6:10-17 as Paul talks about the necessity of wearing the full armor of God so that we can withstand the enemy's evil schemes. Make no mistake about it; one of the biggest schemes that the enemy uses to disable God's people is to keep them preoccupied with drama and conflict so that they never actually get about the business of advancing the kingdom of God.

Knowing this, Paul tells us what we must do:

"Finally, 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



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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.”

Before we go any further talking about the sandals of peace, I want us to go back and take a look at verse 12, “*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.*”

You see, one of the first things that we need to recognize when we’re dealing with people who are constantly trying to provoke us or steal or peace is that we aren’t fighting the people themselves, but rather we are fighting the demonic influences that are at work in these people’s lives.

Okay—please don’t check out on me without allowing me to explain. I’m not saying that these people are demon-possessed. What I’m saying is that because of situations in their past (a traumatic incidence that happened to them, generational iniquities that were passed down to them, or sinful behaviors that they chose to participate in) a door was opened for the enemy to influence their lives. Because his goal is to kill, steal and destroy, the enemy of our souls takes advantage of each open door of pain or sin in the person’s life and uses it to create a destructive behavioral pattern and gain control of a person’s life. Once he’s gained access, he uses his control to continue influencing the person toward more and more destructive behaviors with the ultimate goal of destroying their life and their soul and the lives and souls of anyone who is around them.

Because we are all born with a sinful nature, each one of us has some level of demonic influence in our lives. The good news is that because of Christ’s victory on the

cross, we can choose to repent of our sins, renounce the demonic influences and the influence they have on our behaviors, and gain spiritual deliverance.

The problem is that many people aren't aware of this spiritual benefit or they choose to reject it and they never experience the true deliverance that Christ has for them. Instead, they continue living their lives allowing the demonic influences controlling their lives to control their behavior, influence their relationships, and hold them back from becoming all that God created them to be.

This is truly sad. It's like watching someone suffer in pain from an illness that is killing them only because they are refusing the medicine that would cure them. Still, it happens every day in the spiritual realm---people reject the idea of demons and deliverance and instead continue suffering and struggling under the control of the enemy of their souls.

The hardest part is that there is very little you can do to help someone who is in this situation if they don't want to be helped. Trust me; I've tried it for years.

A person will not be completely set free from the demonic influences that control them until they want to be free and start taking the steps toward deliverance and forming new behavioral patterns. Until they are ready for a life change, the only thing you can do is limit the effect that their choices have in your life.

One of the first ways that you do this is by recognizing that you are not fighting the person but you are fighting the demonic influences at work in their lives.

You might ask, "Seriously, how does that help?"

Well, it helps you gain your perspective as you're making the choice of whether or not to take the bait of their provocation or get sucked into their melodrama.

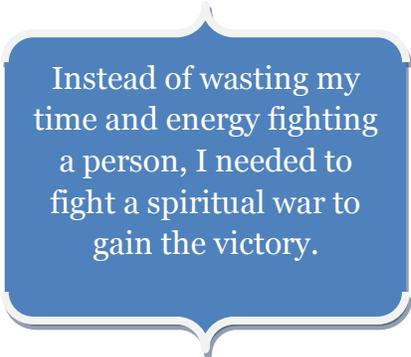
Here's a real life example to help you understand.

I have a person in my life that went through a great deal of abuse as a child. Their family had a lot of issues and there are lots of unaddressed generational iniquities. Add the fact that this person then made a lot of bad choices and allowed sin to control

their lives for far too long, and you understand why there is so much active demonic influence in their lives.

The thing is that this person is always trying to steal my peace by causing a conflict. At first, whenever they would do something hurtful or try to create conflict or drama, I fell for it every time. I was constantly riding the roller coaster of emotional pain, explosive conflict followed by the guilt of not acting like a Christian. Because I was always taking the bait, my life was being controlled by this other person's moods, behaviors, and ultimately, their demonic influences.

Until the day that I finally woke up and realized what was happening. This person was allowing demonic influences to control their lives. If I was ever going to end this cycle, I had to see that I was really fighting the demonic influences inside of this person and start using my spiritual weapons to fight and live in peace. Rather than taking everything so personally, I had to start doing what Paul said and put on the full armor of God so that I could stand up against the enemy's attacks that were coming at me through this person. Instead of wasting my time and energy fighting a person, I needed to fight a spiritual war to gain the victory.



Instead of wasting my time and energy fighting a person, I needed to fight a spiritual war to gain the victory.

In this situation, a big part of fighting the spiritual war was choosing to “walk in peace” or as Paul puts it “*with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*”

Personally, I find it interesting that when Paul talks about choosing to “*put on peace*” he links it with the protection that covers a soldier's foot.

In his book, “Victory in Spiritual Warfare”, Dr. Tony Evans gives us a good picture of what Paul meant when he describes the ancient soldier's shoes of peace.

“A Roman's soldier's shoes were called ‘caliga’---sandals studded heavily with nails. These nails, known as hobnails, were firmly placed directly through the sole of the shoe for increased durability and stability. Similar to cleats worn on football and

soccer fields today, hobnails provided traction when needed. This traction kept the soldier from slipping and sliding, much like cleats help a football or soccer player today. It gave him sure footing, making mobility in battle easier while also making it more difficult to be knocked down.

So when Paul instructs you to have your feet shod, he is talking about placing yourself in a stationary position to stand firm. This creates traction so that when Satan comes, he can't knock you off your feet. In fact, you are able to "stand firm" because the nails coming out of your "peace shoes" have dug deep into the solid ground beneath you." (page 78)

So, how do you stand your ground when someone tries to steal your peace, draw you into a conflict, or fill a situation with drama and confusion?

Basically, you recognize that you're fighting a spiritual battle and choose to put on your shoes of peace that are armed with super strong cleats to help you stand firm as you say, "No, I'm not being sucked in---I'm going to stand in peace and walk in peace.

When your friend comes to you with all the latest gossip, trying to draw you into her conflict, you choose to walk in peace and say, "I'm not choosing sides, I'm not getting involved, go and settle this the way the Bible says you should."

When someone is provoking you, trying to start a fight and make you lose your peace, you can choose to strap on your shoes of peace and tell yourself, "This is not worth fighting about; I'm not going to be sucked into a battle and lose my peace."

(In this case I'm talking about minor annoyances, personality conflicts, and things like that. I understand that there are times when you have to take a stand for right against the forces of wrong. However, one thing I've been learning is to take a step back and assess a skirmish before losing my peace and ask, "Will this battle reap eternal consequences?" If someone's soul is in danger, a battle needs to be fought. If I'm simply annoyed or responding to a provocation, I need to refrain and choose to walk in peace.)

You see, what I'm realizing is that too often we allow our peace to be stolen simply because we do not recognize that we're fighting a spiritual battle. Because we think we're just dealing with difficult situations or difficult people, we don't make the choice to put on our spiritual shoes of peace and walk in peace. Even though we have

this powerful weapon of defense at our disposal, we choose not to put it on---then we wonder why we're always defeated.

You see, as we've said so many times before in this book, wearing the full armor of God involves so much more than simply reciting a verse and simulating putting on the armor of God every morning. The real benefit comes as we make the conscious choice to wear these character traits and allow them to influence our behavior in each and every situation in life.

The truth is that when you actually choose to walk in peace---

---- to choose peace when fear wants to attack,

---- when conflict comes knocking at your door,

---- when the temptation arises to blow a situation out of proportion and react in drama instead of readiness,

---- when you're provoked and you access that you're not fighting flesh and blood, but you're fighting a spiritual battle and respond accordingly,

---- when you literally choose that you will walk in peace no matter what comes your way

---- that's when you'll begin to experience victory.

When you start using peace as defensive weapon, you'll find that you won't be caught up in every wind of chaos and confusion that comes along. Instead, your shoes of peace will help you stand firm and victorious in the face of any battle, unable to be defeated or shaken.

At least that's what I'm learning. Although I can't say I'm always successful, I'm finding that when I do take a deep breath, access the situation, remember that I'm fighting a spiritual war and choose to "walk in peace", I find that I actually experience more peace in my life. Several times I've observed that the choice to "put on peace" has saved me from painful ambushes that would have occurred if I'd responded in emotion

or taken the bait and responded in anger when provoked. Seeing results like this is both challenging and inspiring me to continue taking my new “favorite pair of shoes” out of my “spiritual closet”, walk away from “the bait” and continue to dress for victory by choosing to put on peace. I hope this chapter encourages you to do the same.

Chapter 4

Choosing to Wear the Shield of Faith

*“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
This is what the ancients were commended for.*

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him
must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”*

(Hebrews 11:1 & 6)

What is “faith”?

It’s a word we hear a lot in our culture. It’s become the politically correct way of saying that a person believes in God. It’s become a generic term for religion---any religion.

All a person needs to do is claim to believe in a Being that is Greater than themselves and we say they have “faith”. For example, the other day I heard a religious person talking about the things that were truly important---faith and family. I guess you ruffle fewer feathers if you say “faith” than “Christianity”. It goes along with our society’s belief that all roads lead to Heaven and all religions are equal.

However, just because the culture uses the term “faith” this way, doesn’t mean the Bible defines faith in the same manner.

Another common misinterpretation of the word “faith” comes from within the church, particularly within Charismatic and Pentecostal circles. Rather than devaluing faith so that it forms into any generic belief in any religion, these people go to the other

extreme and define faith as some type of mystical “wishing”. It’s almost superstitious. Throwing all common sense out the window, these misinformed souls believe that if they have enough “faith” they’ll get everything they desire from a magical God without ever taking any personal responsibility for their actions.

They’ll say things like, “I have faith that God will prosper me financially”; yet they take no personal responsibility for their finances. In fact, many times their “faith” causes them to live irresponsibly while they wait and wish, having “faith” that someday God will do a miracle and they will be rich. Even though many times the intentions of their hearts are genuinely good, once again, these people have a misunderstanding of what it truly means to have faith.

So what does it really mean to “have faith”?

Hebrews 11:6 gives us a pretty accurate definition.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

Looking at this verse, we see that the #1 ingredient in an accurate definition of faith is: *Believing that God Exists and that He Is Who He Claims to Be in the Bible.*

At first glance, this Scripture seems to agree with the idea that faith acknowledges the existence of a Higher Power. However, if you look a little closer, you understand that whenever the Bible talks about God they are speaking specifically of “The Supreme Deity.” The One and Only True God of Israel Who sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for the sins of mankind, and then raised Him again on the third day, conquering death and Hell.

This same word for “God” (*Theos*) was used in John 17:3 where God is defined as the Only One True God. *“Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent.”*

The word (*Theos*) was used again in *1 John 5:20*, *“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him Who is true.*

And we are in Him Who is true by being in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

I Thessalonians 1:9-10 talks about turning from idols to serve the One True God (*Theos*). *“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, Who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*

Hence, upon further inspection we see that “faith” involves more than just believing that there is a god, but rather, the writer of Hebrews defines faith as believing in the One and Only True God of the Bible.

You may ask, “Why is this so important?”

Well, in the context of Dressing for Victory and wearing the full armor of God, what may seem like a needless play on words becomes an absolutely essential weapon of defense in your spiritual armor.

Ephesians 6:13-16 says, *“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.”

It’s important that we understand the true definition of faith, so that we can use it as a shield against all of the flaming arrows of lies and deceit that the enemies of our souls wants to use to destroy us.

Before we go any further into practical application, it’s important that we get a good picture of the imagery the writer is using to teach us this spiritual truth. To do this, we need to know more about two things: fiery darts and shields. (Because let’s face it: we don’t see a lot of either in our day to day lives.)

So what are fiery darts?

Albert Barnes tells us that: *“The fiery darts” that were used in war were small, slender pieces of cane, which were filled with combustible materials, and set on fire; or darts around which some combustible material was wound, and which were set on fire, and then shot “slowly” against a foe. The object was to make the arrow fasten in the body, and increase the danger by the burning; or, more frequently, those darts were thrown against ships, forts, tents, etc., with an intention to set them on fire.”*

Dr. Tony Evans describes it this way, *“In Western films, cowboys circled their wagon trains so they could hide behind them and shoot at the Indians. In the early days, it wasn’t a fair fight because the cowboys were the only ones who had the guns and the cover. The Indian’s arrows were no match for the cowboy’s bullets...until the Indians lit the tips of their arrows and aimed them at the wagons.”* (101)

Just like the Indian’s arrows dismantled the cowboy’s defenses, so the fiery darts that the enemy shoots at us are meant to dismantle your defenses so that you’ll be open to every other attack the enemy of your soul wants to send your way. One of the most common fiery darts that the enemy is using to dismantle the defenses of Christians in today’s society is the fiery dart of Universalism or the belief that all religions lead to Heaven or that all human beings and all fallen creatures will ultimately be restored to right relationship with God in Heaven.

One of the most common fiery darts that the enemy is using to dismantle the defenses of Christians in today’s society is the fiery dart of Universalism or the belief that all religions lead to Heaven or that all human beings and all fallen creatures will ultimately be restored to right relationship with God in Heaven.

This fiery arrow is particularly dangerous because it destroys the very foundation of Christianity which teaches that *“Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.”* (John 14:6)

It alleviates the need for salvation, godly living, and fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”* (Mark 16:15)

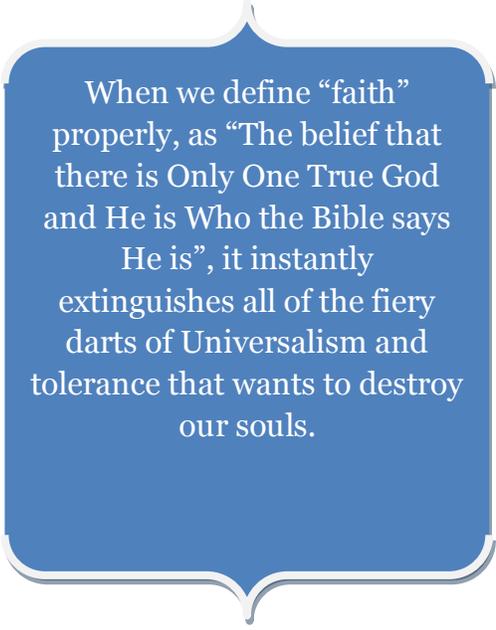
When this fiery dart pierces a person's soul, it opens them up to the possibility of involving themselves in other religions and their practices or falling into a sinful lifestyle. After all, what does it matter? As long as you believe there is a god, you're going to Heaven, right? WRONG!

That's why it's so important that Christians are dressed with the shield of faith as a defense against this and all of the fiery darts of the evil one.

What does a shield do?

Well, in this verse, the shield described is a large Roman shield that is covered in leather or some kind of animal skin. The soldier would then dip the shield in water so that if a fiery arrow came at him, it would be instantly snuffed out.

In our lives, faith is the dripping wet shield that instantly extinguishes the flaming arrows of the enemy. When we define "*faith*" properly, as "*The belief that there is Only One True God and He is Who the Bible says He is*", it instantly extinguishes all of the fiery darts of Universalism and tolerance that wants to destroy our souls.



When we define "faith" properly, as "The belief that there is Only One True God and He is Who the Bible says He is", it instantly extinguishes all of the fiery darts of Universalism and tolerance that wants to destroy our souls.

So practically speaking, how can we make sure that we are armed with the shield of faith?

1. We have to make the Conscious Choice to Believe that there is Only One True God, one True Religion---Christianity---as it is taught in the Bible.

This is a decision that you must make.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*"

The first step in arming yourself with the shield of faith is choosing to believe that that God is Who He says He is. It's the choice to believe that God and the Bible are telling the truth.

2. We must choose to read the Bible to learn about God.

It isn't enough to simply say, I believe in the Supreme Being—the One True God. You need to know Who He is, what He's done, how He thinks, and what He expects from His people. The only way for us to know these things is through reading the Bible, God's Word.

As we read it and study it, and watch His story unfold throughout human history, our faith will increase from a choice to believe, into a belief that He exists and He has a plan for humanity.

The more we get to know God personally and develop a relationship with Him by reading His Word, the stronger our faith will become creating a greater defense in our lives against the flaming arrows of the enemy.

3. We need to study our Theology.

I know that the word "theology" scares many people. It sounds confusing and technical---like something a Biblical scholar should understand, but not your average Christian. Ironically, this lie is one of the flaming arrows that the enemy throws at us saying, "You don't really need to know this stuff".

However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, a good working knowledge of theology will deepen your faith and give you an even stronger defense for when the enemy comes against you with his fiery darts of lies and doubt.

The truth is that theology is nothing more than the study of the nature of God and religious belief. Theology explains why we believe what we believe. The more theology that you know, the stronger your shield of faith becomes because you've got concrete knowledge to back up your beliefs. It also makes you a more effective witness because

you can intelligently answer people's questions about God rather than just demand that they believe without any explanation or fact.

Let's look at an example:

Hebrews 11:3 says, *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."*

Most Christians accept on faith that God created the world out of nothing because the Bible says He did. However, we don't live in a world that simply accepts this fact anymore. Evolution is taught as scientific fact in today's school system. Many Christians struggle with the issue of reconciling their faith to what seems to be scientific fact.

What's the answer to this dilemma? Theology.

A thorough study of Creationism will prove that there is just as much evidence for the theory of Creationism as there is for the theory of Evolution---possibly even more. There is a mountain of available resources online or in books that contain scientific evidence that it is possible that God created the world just as the Bible says. Once you understand the theology of Creation, then you've got a solid foundation to base your choice to have faith that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. It's like adding a few extra layers of protection onto your shield of faith giving you a super-strong defense against the enemy.

When you put all three of these components together: choosing to believe, reading the Bible to learn Who God is, and studying your theology, they will help you reach the goal of: Believing that God Exists and that He Is Who He Claims to Be in the Bible. This is the first step in truly wearing the Shield of Faith as a weapon of defense against the devil's evil schemes.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about the other side of what it means to have faith--the practical side---believing that God is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

But for now, it's time to practically apply step #1. It's time to ask ourselves, "Am I dressing for victory by wearing my shield of faith?"

What does faith mean to me?

Have I bought into any wrong definitions of "faith"?

Am I doing all I can to build up my faith---according to the true definition of faith---my belief in Who God is?

The answers to these questions will tell the story of whether you're deflecting the enemy's attacks using the shield of faith, or walking naked and defenseless through a battlefield.

The answers to these questions could save your spiritual life; yet they are questions only you can answer. After you've answered these questions, make the decision to take up your shield of faith and start dressing for victory. In the world of spiritual warfare, it's the one accessory you don't want to be without!

Chapter 5

Choosing to Wear the Shield of Faith (Part 2)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.

You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

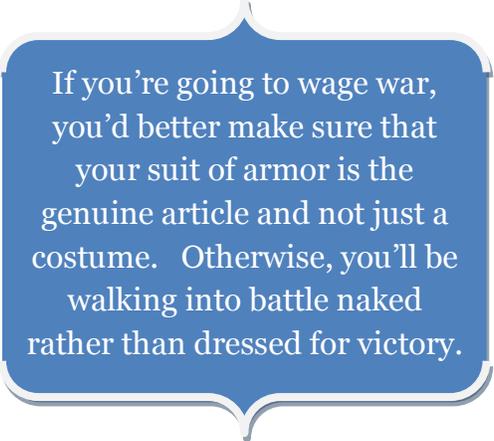
As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14-26)

I love the book of James because it doesn't pull any punches. The author says exactly what he means and he means what he says.

In this passage, James makes it completely clear that there's no use in claiming to have "faith" unless that "faith" is making a significant impact on the behaviors and actions in your everyday life. Anything else isn't genuine faith. It's like a child who plays pretend and walks around claiming to be Superman, even though we all know if he tries to jump off of anything he's going to fall flat on his face rather than fly.

When it comes to the world of spiritual warfare, claiming to have "faith" that is unaccompanied by works is like this same costume-clad child deciding that he's going to challenge the bigger stronger school bully to a fight thinking that the costume will scare him away. Of course, we all know that this isn't going to happen.

Unless there is an adult around to protect the child, our little superhero is soon going to learn that there's a big difference between waging war with your words and having the power to back up your words with actions. If you're going to wage war, you'd better make sure that your suit of armor is the genuine article and not just a costume. Otherwise, you'll be walking into battle naked rather than dressed for victory.



If you're going to wage war, you'd better make sure that your suit of armor is the genuine article and not just a costume. Otherwise, you'll be walking into battle naked rather than dressed for victory.

This is especially true when it comes to the Shield of Faith that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:13-16:

"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.”

If you read the last chapter, you'll remember that we talked about the fact that the shield Paul was describing was a large Roman shield that is covered in leather or some kind of animal skin so that it could be dipped in water in case a fiery arrow was thrown at the soldier. In that case, the fiery arrow would hit the sopping wet shield and be instantly snuffed out.

In our lives, faith is the dripping wet shield that instantly extinguishes the flaming arrows of the enemy. When attacks come at us from all directions, raising the shield of faith will stop the attacks dead in their tracks before they can ever penetrate our hearts and minds bringing destruction.

Wow! Understanding this visual imagery helps us understand the powerful role that faith plays in the life of a Christian. It challenges us to make sure that we understand what faith is and inspect our own hearts to make sure that our faith is alive and active. After all, you don't want to find yourself up against a war of fiery darts with a toy shield---you want the real deal!

So how can we make sure that our faith is the real deal---a strong powerful sword that will stand against the enemy?

Well, the first step is getting a clear understanding of what it means to “have faith”. In chapter 4, we talked about the fact that there are lots of false definitions of faith in our society today. However, the writer of Hebrews gives us a pretty accurate description of what it means to have true genuine faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”*

This verse explains the two important components in faith:

1. Belief---We must believe that God exists and that He Is Who He claims to be in the Bible.
2. Actions---We must live like we believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

In this chapter, we're going to move onto the next ingredient that naturally follows believing that God exists as He is described in the Bible---acting on what you believe.

You see, it isn't enough just to believe that God exists. As James 2:18 says, "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder!*"

The truth is that faith isn't really true and genuine until it is evidenced by your actions.

If we read on, we see that James goes on to give us 2 examples of people who did more than just believe: Abraham and Rahab. In both cases, their faith influenced their actions.

Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. (James 2:21-23)

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? (James 2:25)

In you read through all of Hebrews 11, you'll see example after example of people who displayed their belief that God exists and He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. In each scenario, you'll see that it wasn't their system of beliefs that made these men and women Heroes of the Faith, rather it was their willingness to act in accordance with their belief system. As you read through these verses, you can't help

but think that each life proved that *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* (James 2:17)

So let's get practical? How can we follow their example and make sure that our faith is alive, thriving, and powerful enough to act as a shield against the enemy's attacks?

1. *We must seek God.*

How do we diligently seek God?

By diligently reading and studying the Bible.

There is no other way to get to know Who God is, how He thinks, and what He expects from you and I. There's no mystical path to special revelation and no alternative detour down an easier road.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God telling us everything we could ever want to know about God's heart, His mind, His plan, His purpose, His will, His Laws, and His desires. It tells us the story of God's plan for man from the beginning of time all the way through the end of the earth as we know it. It reveals to us God's plan for salvation through Jesus Christ, and tells us how we can have a personal relationship with Him. The Bible also gives us practical teaching regarding what God expects from human beings and spells out in specific detail what it means to put your faith into action by obeying the commands found in the Bible. If you want to seek God, or draw near to Him, then you need to become a student of His Word.

2. *We must apply what we read in the Bible to our daily lives.*

You see, it's one thing to simply read the Bible. It's another thing to say you believe the Bible is true.

However, faith begins when you are so convinced that the Bible is God's Word and ultimate truth that you apply it to your life and actually do what it tells you to do.

Think about it--if you really believe that the Bible is God's standard for life and you really believe that God rewards those who obey the commands of the Bible and

Faith begins when you are so convinced that the Bible is God's Word and ultimate truth that you apply it to your life and actually do what it tells you to do.

punishes those who don't, doesn't it make sense that you would diligently try to follow the teachings of the Bible? Doesn't anything less than consistent, diligent attempts at obedience suggest that you don't really believe the Bible is true?

You may need to stop and think about those last statements for awhile. Really, they are good thoughts to ponder. Because here's the thing: *If you're actions are not aligned with the beliefs that you say you have, there's a good chance that you don't really believe what you say you do.*

If your beliefs and your actions are not symbiotic, then there are some major gaps in your Shield of Faith that are leaving you open and exposed to the enemy's destructive attacks in your life.

One of the facts that we've discussed before in this book is that the #1 way a Christian invites demonic activity into their lives is by tolerating sin in their lives. It's like an invitation to the enemy saying, "Come and devour me." The only way to really dress for victory and stand against the enemy's attacks in your life is to raise the shield of faith by applying what the Bible says in each and every area of your life.

3. *We must be diligent.*

To be "*diligent*" means to be "*marked by persevering, painstaking effort; to be careful and persevering in carrying out tasks or duties; to be constant and earnest in effort and application; attentive and persistent in doing something.*"

This is the word that the author of Hebrews uses to describe how we are to seek God if we are to be people of genuine faith.

It's the complete opposite of the "pick-and-choose-I'll-take-what-I-like-from-the-Bible-and-ignore-the-rest" attitude that is far too pervasive within the church today. Instead, if we are going to be dressed for victory, fully armed and protected against the attacks of the enemy we are going to have to be diligent in our efforts to apply the teachings of the Bible. We need to accept that the Bible is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and our lives must reflect that attitude. We need to be both

constant and earnest in our effort and application of the Word if we want to keep our shield of faith strong and void of gaps.

4. We must live as if God is a Rewarder of Those Who Diligently Seek Him.

If you read through Hebrews 11, you'll find one common thread running through the lives of each man or woman in the Faith Hall of Fame. Each one viewed their lives through the lens of eternity.

They didn't base their decisions or choices on what would be best for them in the here and now; instead, they chose to obey God because they believed that their choices would hold eternal rewards. That's what sustained their faith and helped them hold to their beliefs and continue living out their faith on a daily basis even when times were hard. They understood the big picture---life is about more than the 70, 80, or 90 years we spend on this earth---life is just a prelude to eternity.

Because of this understanding, they were people who lived victorious lives. I believe it was because they possessed and used the shield of faith that they were able to overcome fear, doubt, and temptation and be game-changers in the kingdom of God. They attempted things that would have stopped other people dead in their tracks and overcame things that would have waylaid other people in life. Yet, they arose victorious because they understood that whatever happens on this earth is only temporary.

They truly believed that God existed and that He was Who He said He was and He would do what He said He would do. They understood that God is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and even if they didn't reap those rewards on earth, they'd be rewarded in Heaven. Because of their deeply held beliefs and their desire to please God, they diligently sought Him. Their faith wasn't just in words, but they lived it with their actions. They dressed for victory and they were victorious. Now their example stands as a challenge for each of us today.

Will we follow their example?

Will we determine to cultivate a faith based on our knowledge of Who God Really Is?

Will we believe what we learn of God enough to let it influence every part of our lives until we are radical followers of Jesus Christ?

Will we go beyond words and put our faith into action making it real and alive?

Will we be people of faith who can use our shield to stand against the enemies evil schemes or will be children who pretend to have faith but are really wearing a costume?

I don't know about you, but I want my faith to be the real deal---strong, powerful, and able to overcome each and every attack of the enemy. That's why I'm committed to doing my part and being a person not only believes that God is, but who allows that belief to influence by behavior. It's the only way to be dressed for victory. It's the only way to be victorious.

Chapter 6

Choosing to Wear the Helmet of Salvation

Because He Lives, I Can Face Tomorrow

Because He Lives, All Fear Is Gone

Because I Know He Holds the Future

Life Is Worth the Living Just Because He Lives

How can a Christian continue to believe in a good, righteous God even when terrible, unexplainable things happen?

How can we have hope for the future even when it seems that all hope is lost?

What challenges you to do the right thing, even when it would be so much easier to do what is wrong?

For the Christian, the answer to this question and so many more is always, “Because He Lives”.

Because God left Heaven and came to earth as a Man.

Because He lived for 33 years experiencing all of the same trials and temptations that we do each day.

Because He suffered and died on a cross paying the penalty for the sins of all mankind.

Because He rose again on the third day, declaring victory over sin, death, and the grave.

Because we have the hope of salvation, we can face whatever trials may come or whatever fiery darts the enemy may throw at us knowing, as sure as I am that I need oxygen to breath or that gravity will keep me from flying, that because of my salvation there is always hope for this life and beyond into eternity. Because He lives, I have hope--- the hope of salvation.

I have to be honest and say that I struggled with the concept of the helmet of salvation for quite some time before writing this chapter. I read various commentaries to try to understand it, yet none of them seemed to explain how this very vital piece of equipment could be practically applied in a Christian's everyday life.

Obviously, I knew that the helmet had something to do with protecting the mind. Dr. Tony Evans says:

“The main purpose of the helmet---in battle, sports, or work situations like construction sites---is to protect the brain from injury...The brain must be fiercely protected because once the brain becomes damaged, body function also becomes damaged....With the helmet, Paul once again used a physical example to illustrate a spiritual truth. He demonstrates that just as the brain is the control center for the rest of the body, the mind is the control center for the will and emotions. The mind must be protected with a helmet that's able to absorb the shocks of being hit by the enemy and even knocked to the ground in the spiritual realm.” (105-106)

Being that Paul says that salvation protects our minds that way that a helmet protects the brain, the next question we need to ask ourselves is, what is salvation?

In the original Greek, the word used for “salvation” (*soṓterion*) is the same word that is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 as “the hope of salvation”.

“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”

What's interesting is that if we go back a few verses and read the entire context of 1 Thessalonians 5:8, we can see how this weapon can be practically applied to a Christian's life.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-11, "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

In this passage we see Paul challenging Christians by saying that the hope of salvation sets them apart from those who are unsaved and do not have this hope in their lives. He compares it to the difference between living in darkness and living in light. He says that because we have the hope of salvation enlightening our minds, we should live differently than the world.

For instance, at its core Salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequences brought about by faith in Christ. Before we accepted God's gift of salvation, our lives were controlled and dominated by sin. We had no hope of ever breaking free from the cycles of devastating pain that this sin brought into our lives. After this life, the only thing we had to look forward to was suffering the penalty that our sins deserved in Hell for eternity.

But thanks to God and the gift of His Salvation, we now have hope! First, hope that we can be forgiven of all of the sins we've ever committed because of the price that Jesus paid at Calvary's cross. Now, because of that forgiveness, we are no longer destined to an eternity of suffering and torment in Hell. The penalty of our sins no longer controls our eternal destiny. Instead, Jesus controls our eternal destiny and that provides us with hope.

However, this hope is not just a future hope---it's a hope for today as well. Because of the victory Jesus won at the cross, we do not have to be controlled by our sins any longer here on earth. We are now free from the sin that once held us in captivity,

making us its slaves and determining the course of our lives. Now as free people, we can make the choice not to sin, but rather, to live according to God's Laws. As we do this, it will change not only our eternal destiny, but the path that we take in this life as well. As we live the Law of Reciprocity, we will not constantly be reaping the bad seeds of the sins we sowed, but we will begin reaping good, profitable results in our lives as we daily sow the seeds of following God's Laws.

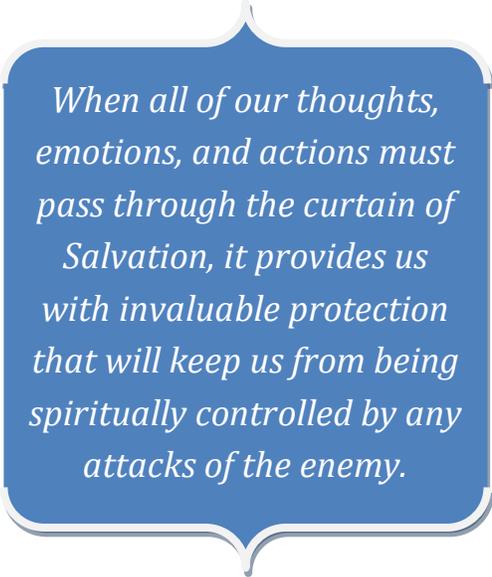
This is where we move from the theological to the practical aspect of this passage. It's where we go from talking about the helmet of salvation and move toward understanding how we can practically apply it to our lives and use it as mental protection.

How do we choose to "Take Up the Helmet of Salvation" as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:17?

Well, the first thing we need to understand is that we "take up" or "put on" the helmet of salvation by choosing to give Salvation and all that it means control and domination of our minds.

What does that mean?

Well, basically, it means that just as the helmet protects the brain by providing a barrier that prevents any dangerous element from passing through and damaging the brain, the knowledge and belief in our salvation and all of the benefits that it provides creates a barrier through which all of our thoughts, emotions, and actions must pass. When all of our thoughts, emotions, and actions must pass through the curtain of Salvation, it provides us with invaluable protection that will keep us from being spiritually controlled by any attacks of the enemy.



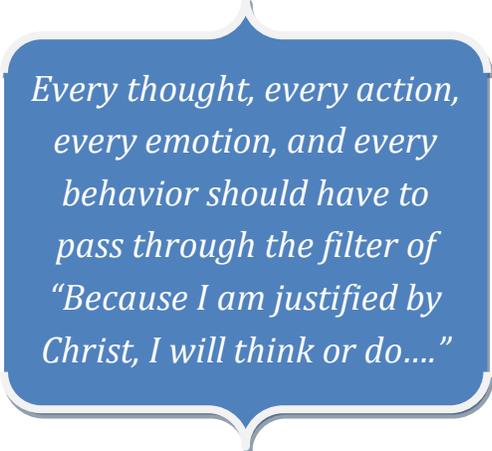
When all of our thoughts, emotions, and actions must pass through the curtain of Salvation, it provides us with invaluable protection that will keep us from being spiritually controlled by any attacks of the enemy.

For example, we've already talked about the fact that salvation provides us with the forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Once we have asked Jesus into our hearts, we are forgiven. The technical term is "Justified" which means that God takes guilty

sinner and declares them righteous because of what Jesus has done for them. Because of Christ, guilty sinners are acquitted.

Justification can be explained this way: When a person accepts Jesus as His Savior, God not only removes the stain of sin but He also replaces the stain with the righteous standard of Christ. Now when God looks at you, He doesn't see someone who sinned, He sees Jesus. He doesn't just see someone who has been forgiven of his or her sins; He sees someone who has kept the full standard of righteousness.

Take a second and let that sink in. That's pretty amazing stuff! Because of Christ's death on the cross, no matter what I've done, when I ask Jesus to forgive me of my sins, God wipes the slate clean and sees me as one who's never sinned. That's incredible!



Every thought, every action, every emotion, and every behavior should have to pass through the filter of "Because I am justified by Christ, I will think or do...."

Knowing the awesomeness of this fact should create a response within the soul of a Christian. The response should be INTENSE GRATITUDE.

The truth is that Justification is not something we deserve. It isn't something you're entitled to receive. In fact, quite the contrary, there's absolutely no way you could ever earn a gift this tremendous. In light of this knowledge, every Christian should be so intensely grateful to God that they want to live every part of their lives for Jesus, giving themselves to Him 100% wholeheartedly.

This knowledge of what it means to be justified should cover our heads like a helmet. Every thought, every action, every emotion, and every behavior should have to pass through the filter of "Because I am justified by Christ, I will think or do...." If we truly applied this vital piece of equipment to our lives, then we would no longer be dabbling with the sin or doubts that leave us open to the spiritual attacks of the enemy. Instead, the knowledge of our salvation would protect us.

Another way that acting on the knowledge of what salvation provides can protect us is by realizing that Salvation provides us deliverance from sin. Because of the victory that Jesus won at the cross, Christians do not have to live their lives controlled by any demonic powers or strongholds, generational iniquities, or demonic oppressions from the sins we've committed. Instead, we can seek spiritual deliverance and renounce any control that these powers have on our lives. We can choose to say, "Because Jesus provided for my salvation and deliverance, I will not be controlled by any demonic influences that want to destroy me, my life or my family any longer. In Jesus' name, I command you to leave me life and not return."

To be honest, this is one of the biggest ways that I see Christians forfeiting the benefits of the word that Jesus did at Calvary. Too often, Christians become apathetic and tolerate sin and demonic control in their lives because, "That's just the way I am....I've always been that way...My family's always been that way....It's just in our DNA and that's how it's going to be." As they accept these generational patterns of demonic control in their lives, they are agreeing to be constantly defeated by the enemy because they have convinced themselves they have no other choice.

Well, I'm here to tell you today that you do have another choice. You can fight! You can stand up and say, "Because Jesus provided for my DELIVERANCE when He provided my SALVATION, I do not have to be controlled by these things any longer." When you choose to actively pursue all avenues necessary to experience spiritual deliverance, you are choosing to put on the helmet of salvation and stop being controlled by thoughts of bondage and start being controlled by the knowledge of salvation and freedom.

Let's look at another way that we can apply the Helmet of Salvation to our lives and use it as protection against the enemy's attacks. Again, we've already talked about how salvation provides us with more than the forgiveness and deliverance from sins in this life, but salvation provides us with freedom from the punishment that our sins deserve in the life to come. Instead, because of Christ's death and resurrection, if you have accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, you now have the hope of spending

eternity in Heaven with Him. This hope and this knowledge should revolutionize all of your thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

For as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:19 & 32, *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”*

And, *“If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”*

This is how those who have no hope in Christ live---they do whatever they want whenever they want believing that they only have these few fleeting hours that each of us calls a lifetime.

However, those of us who have the knowledge of salvation should not live like this. Instead, every moment of our day should be seen through the eyes of eternity.

This is the hope that causes us to keep believing even when things are difficult---because we know that we don't live only for this life, but we are living with all of eternity in view.

This is the perspective that challenges us to do the right thing even when it's difficult or we're being persecuted for it, because we know that we aren't living just for this moment, but we are living for the reward of eternity.

This is why we choose to live pure lives as Christians and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. Because we know there is a real Heaven and a real Hell, we want to make sure that we are going to Heaven and that we take as many people with us as we possible.

You see, this is how the Helmet of Salvation acts as a piece of protective equipment. When the knowledge of our salvation becomes a constant mental filter our perspective changes.

When we make the choice that every thought, every attitude, every word, and every action must pass through the barrier of remembering that we are forgiven and delivered from our sins and that we have the hope of eternal life in Heaven, we cannot

live as we did before. The purpose of our lives shifts from pleasing ourselves or other people toward focusing on pleasing God.

When the hope of our salvation is constantly in the forefront of our minds, we will be able to stand against any attack of doubt or fear or temptation that the enemy throws at us. Like the old song says, we will be able to answer, “Because He Lives and provided my Salvation, I will not be defeated, but I will make the choice to ‘put on the helmet of salvation’ and overcome.”

Chapter 7

Choosing to Carry the Sword of the Spirit

I'd just graduated from college when the Christian world was overcome by the "What Would Jesus Do?" movement. Inspired by the book, "In His Steps" by Charles Sheldon, a youth group leader in Michigan began a grassroots movement to help the teenagers in her group remember the phrase. It spread nationwide, and suddenly bracelets bearing the initials W.W.J.D. became the latest rage in the Christian world.

As I was thinking about the Sword of The Spirit, I couldn't help but think how applicable the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" is to our discussion of using the Word of God as a spiritual weapon.

After all, when we ask ourselves, "What Did Jesus Do when He was in a spiritual battle?" the answer is: "He pulled out the Word of God and used it as a spiritual weapon."

But first, let's refresh our minds, by taking a look at the passage we're studying.

"Finally, 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. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

So far in this study, we've learned several facts from this verse:

- #1. As Christians, we are all in a spiritual battle.
- #2. God has given us spiritual weapons that we can use to defeat the enemy.
- #3. It's our job to learn how to practically use these weapons to win the spiritual battle in our own lives.

I can't think of a better way to talk about how to practically use the Word of God as a sword in our lives to overcome the evil schemes of our enemy, Satan, then to look to the Master's example and see how Jesus used the Word of God as a sword to overcome His own battle with Satan while He was on earth. Let's start by looking at Matthew 4:1-4.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Let's stop here for a moment and notice a few things.

First, let's look at Satan's motivation: He tempted Jesus in an attempt to get Jesus to sin. In the book, "Intense Moments with the Savior" Ken Gire says:

"The temptation was not to make Jesus doubt Himself, but to depend on Himself. Since the Father hasn't lifted a finger to alleviate His suffering, why not take things into His own hands?" (39)

Next, look at Satan's methods: He appealed to Jesus' natural fleshly desires. Notice that just like he does with us, the enemy was appealing to Jesus' human appetites in an effort to destroy His spiritual life and ultimately thwart the plan that the Father had for Jesus' life.

Finally, notice how Jesus responded: Jesus answered, *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus overcame the enemy's temptation and the desire of His own flesh by using the Word of God as a sword and annihilating the enemy's argument. Basically, Jesus said, "It doesn't matter that I'm hungry or that I could misuse God's power to fulfill My fleshly desires. God's Word is the ultimate authority in My life, and this is what it says." As He quoted the Scripture He was saying, "I will obey God's Word and not succumb to temptation."

So how can we practically follow Jesus example and win the spiritual battles in our own lives? Let's start by agreeing that many of the spiritual battles that Christians face on a daily basis come as the enemy tries to lure us into focusing on our physical, fleshly appetites.

In Jesus' case, He'd been fasting for 40 days and He craved food. The enemy attacked by trying to get Jesus to focus on His hunger, believe His hunger was the most important thing, and do what He had to do to fill His hunger.

Today, the enemy uses the same method of appealing to our appetites to get us to focus on our hunger and do whatever we need to do to fill our needs, even if it means turning away from God and falling into sin. The only difference is that our hunger doesn't usually come from a 40 day fast. The appetites of our flesh come in many different forms.

There is the temptation of our sexual appetites.

Some people have an appetite for more money or things.

Others people may have an appetite for revenge or anger.

Perhaps another's appetites could lead them toward violence or abuse.

Some have an appetite for gossip, lying, drama, causing division or a host of other options. However, in the end, the result is always the same: When you allow your appetites to drive the car in your life, you will end up in a tragic wreck spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. That's why one of Satan's favorite battle plans is to get Christians to focus on their appetites, cause them to feel that it isn't fair that God isn't filling that hunger, and ultimately lead them toward the choice that it's best if they abandon God's way and fill their appetite on their own.

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It's like James says in James 1:14-15: *"Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."*

Hunger—Sin to fulfill hunger---defeat---if unrepentant, spiritual death.

That's the enemy's goal. How can we overcome?

We need to do what Jesus did.

We need to use the Word of God like a sword to tear down the devil's evil schemes.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

What did Jesus do when the enemy tried to get Him to sin by appealing to His hunger? He used the Word of God that was hidden in His heart and He used it to tear the enemy’s evil scheme to shreds.

Let’s take a second look: *“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

Using Scripture as His standard, Jesus turned the tables on Satan. By doing this, Jesus was saying, “My natural hunger and appetites are NOT the driving force in My life. I don’t make My choices based on them. Instead, I make my decisions and choices based on the Word of God.”

That’s how Jesus won His spiritual battle. If we want to live as victorious Christians and overcome the attacks of our spiritual enemy, we’ll have to do what Jesus did.

We need to make Bible reading, study, and memorization a priority in our lives.

If we want to follow Jesus’ example and walk in His steps in spiritual warfare, we’ve got to start by following His example by hiding God’s Word in our hearts.

Psalms 119:11 says, *“I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”*

Now let’s get real. Can you handle some straight talk that might one day save your spiritual life? One thing that we need to recognize is that Jesus could use the Word of God as a weapon because Jesus knew what the Word of God said.

One of the biggest reasons that modern day Christians aren’t living as victorious Christians, but falling prey to the enemy’s attacks is that there is an epidemic of Biblical illiteracy. Too many Christians don’t read the Bible, so they don’t know what it says. The basic truth is that if you aren’t reading the Bible and hiding God’s Word in your

heart, you won't be able to use it as a weapon when the enemy attacks. Instead, when the enemy attacks, you'll go to pull out your spiritual gun and find that you have no ammunition.

Remember: Jesus was only able to use the Scripture as a spiritual weapon because He knew what the Scripture said. Because He knew what the Bible said, He knew God's standards, and did not fall for the cunning deception of the enemy that wanted Him to give into the desires of His flesh. If we as Christians are going to do what Jesus did, then we need to do the same and be committed to hiding God's Word in our hearts.

The next thing we need to do to follow Jesus' example in fighting the spiritual battle is to make a commitment to studying the Word of God so that we understand what the Bible means. Let's look at why this is important as we study Jesus' next temptation.

One thing that we need to recognize is that Jesus could use the Word of God as a weapon because Jesus knew what the Word of God said.

Matthew 4:5-7, *"Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple.*

'If You are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw Yourself down. For it is written: "He will command His angels concerning You, and they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone."

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

This is very interesting. Notice that when Satan couldn't get Jesus to sin against God by appealing to His fleshly appetites, the enemy tried to twist the Word of God to cause Jesus to go against God's perfect will for His life. Just like he did with Eve in the Garden, the enemy tried to twist and confuse the God's commands to win the battle. However, Jesus was not Eve and He was not so easily deceived.

You see, even though Satan tried to use God's own Words to tempt Jesus (and have no doubt, he was quoting directly from Psalm 91:11-12), Jesus was not defeated. Why? Because Jesus hadn't just read the Word, He'd studied the Old Testament, and He knew what the Scriptures meant. He knew that these verses were a promise of protection, not an invitation to put God to the test or perform miracles on demand. Because He understood God's Word, He was able to see right through the enemy's scheme, tear it down and speak the Truth of God back into the situation when He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 and said, "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*"

2 Timothy 2:15 says, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth.*"

You see, besides the Biblical illiteracy that comes from Christians not reading the Bible, there is another reason that too many Christians are not living victorious lives in Christ. The sad fact is that because many of the Christians who DO read the Bible don't take the time to study the Bible, they don't understand what it means. Hence, any deceiver who comes along quoting a passage of Scripture or even something that remotely sounds like a passage of Scripture is able to manipulate well-intended people into believing and acting on lies that are totally contrary to what the Bible says.

Quite frankly, there is only one way to properly arm yourself for a spiritual attack of this level---good old fashioned, Bible Study. Thanks to modern technology, the tools necessary for this task are literally right at our fingertips. While years ago, one might have been required to have a library filled with commentaries, Bible dictionaries, lexicons, and Greek/Hebrew dictionaries to thoroughly study a passage of Scripture, many of these tools are now available to download for free at www.e-sword.net.

To begin studying a passage of Scripture, you start by reading a portion of the Bible.

Perhaps you might want to read it in more than one translation (which is easy to do thanks to www.biblegateway.com)

Then, turn to a reliable commentary such as the Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary or Barnes Notes on the New Testament (available under “Barnes” at www.e-sword.net) and read what scholars have spent years deciphering the original intent of the passage to mean.

You can even do word studies to find out what the exact passage of a verse was in the original Hebrew and Greek. (Again, www.esword.net helps those of us with very little knowledge of the ancient languages find this information very quickly and easily.)

As you use these tools and many more than are available to you at your Christian bookstore, you’ll move beyond just reading the Bible to understanding the Bible. When Bible study becomes a habit in your life, you’ll be following in Jesus’ footsteps. Rather than being easily deceived like Eve, the knowledge of God’s Word in your heart will enable you fight the enemy’s schemes and say, “That’s not what that Scripture means. You’re twisting God’s Word for your own purposes. This is what the Bible says, and this is what I’m going to do.” That’s how you wage spiritual warfare like Jesus did.

Now, let’s move on and see one final way spiritual discipline that Jesus incorporated into His spiritual battle plan: Scripture Memorization.

Jesus was able to defeat the enemy using the Word of God because He knew the Scriptures, He understood the Scriptures, and He was able to quote Scripture.

Matthew 4:7-10, *“Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give You,’ he said, ‘if You will bow down and worship me.’*

Jesus said to him, ‘Away from Me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

Again, Satan tried to appeal to Jesus’ flesh. Turn away from God’s plan---skip the cross and all the suffering---achieve world domination and don’t worry about the redemption of mankind. The battle lines were drawn.

How did Jesus respond?

Just as He did every other time---He quoted the Word of God as He stood His ground saying, “I will obey God no matter what.”

Essentially, this is where memorized Scripture becomes an incredible asset in a Christian’s war arsenal. Because one thing that I’ve realized in studying this passage, is that Jesus didn’t quote Scripture for Satan’s benefit. He quoted Scripture to let Satan know that He knew what God wanted and He was choosing to obey God.

You see, Satan didn’t need to be reminded of what the Scriptures said. He already knew. In fact, the enemy probably knows the Bible better than most Christians. And he’s taken that knowledge and spent centuries trying to twist it and pervert it to deceive people. What he’s counting on is that YOU don’t know it.

That’s why memorizing Scripture is such a great weapon. Because as you speak God’s Word out loud to defeat Satan’s lies, you’re letting him know that you know what God’s Word says and you intend to obey it. You’re also reminding yourself, with all of your appetites and emotions, that the priority in your life is obedience to God’s Word. Like Jesus, when you quote Scripture you are saying, “I know what the Bible says, and I am going to obey it, NO MATTER WHAT.”

That’s why it’s so important that we, as Christians, are committed to reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible,

As we said at the beginning of the book, we are in a spiritual battle.

The Word of God is the sword we’ve been given to annihilate the enemy.

Now the choice is ours. Will we choose to take up our sword and be prepared to use it so that when we are spiritually attacked, our weapon will be fully loaded and prepared to defend and defeat our enemy?

You see, any soldier will tell you that the middle of the battle isn’t the time to start looking for and loading your gun with ammunition. No, you need to have that prep work done ahead of time so that you can use your gun to fight and win the battle. In the same way, you need to prepare your heart and mind ahead of the spiritual battle

by reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word. Then when the enemy attacks, you'll be ready to fight, stand your ground and gain the victory using the Word of God that is already in your heart.

It's how Jesus fought His spiritual battles. Now will you Do What Jesus Did?

Chapter 8

What Are You Going to Wear?

Did you ever buy an item of clothing, put it in your closet, and save it for a special occasion, only to find out months or years later when you pull it out that is no longer fit or had become damaged by time?

I remember a few years ago, I insisted I needed to buy a suit. I was convinced I needed a suit to have in my closet for when a special occasion came up or a big speaking engagement arrived. So I spent the money on a brand new, navy blue suit. I brought it home, put it in the back of my closet, and waited for a chance to wear it.

Months went by, and no opportunity to wear my new suit. Months turned into years. We don't live in a suit world anymore. When I speak, I wear jeans and a polo shirt. People don't wear suits to church. Inevitably, I never got a chance to wear the suit.

Then my big chance arrived! A friend was getting married! I pulled out the suit to get it ironed and ready, only to realize that it had shrunk hanging in the closet for so many years!

Okay, so the suit hadn't shrunk, my stomach had expanded...either way, I couldn't button the pants, and the suit that I had hanging in the back of the closet no longer fit. The beautiful suit that was meant to be worn instead of stored away in the closet did me absolutely no good. I didn't get my money's worth. Why? Because I didn't use it.

The moral of the story---some things are meant to be used, not stored away for a special occasion.

As I was pondering how we should wrap up our series on “Dressing for Victory”, I felt like the best way we could end our discussion is by pointing out that just its wasteful to save special items in our closets for use on special occasions, it’s wasteful to keep the Spiritual Armor God has given us tucked away without using it.

Speaking more practically, it does us no good to know that God has given us spiritual armor, to know what that spiritual armor represents, and how it should be used in our lives, unless we use this knowledge to put on our spiritual armor every day and wear it.

You see, one of the biggest misconceptions many Christians have about spiritual warfare, is that they treat it like it’s a special occasion. They act like the weapons God has given us are supposed to be stored away for the rare occasion when we come under Satanic attack.

Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. Reality is that every day we are in a spiritual battle with the enemy of our souls. The spiritual weapons God has given us are not meant to be understood and filed away as head knowledge, but they are meant to be a part of our lives every day so that we can stand our ground against temptation, evil, and the daily attacks of Satan. Maybe even more importantly, we are supposed to wear our spiritual armor every day to fight against the sinful nature that is inside of us---to help us fight the battle between our own sinful nature and the new man that wants to live as a follower of Christ.

But we’ve talked about all this.

We’ve talked about the fact that there is a spiritual battle. We’re in it.

Satan, our enemy hates us and wants to use all means possible to destroy us.

We’ve even discussed that fact that God will allow these attacks and battles to come our way so that we grow spiritually.

The only question left to ask is “What are you waiting for?”

Today, are you going to choose to “put on” the spiritual armor that God has given you or are you going to be a wimpy, defeated victim that falls into every trap the enemy sets for you?

This is where the rubber meets the road.

Will you choose to live your life in complete and absolute truth, choosing to reject the lies of our society, reject the lies about yourself, and living by the absolute truth as it is defined in the Word of God?

Will you choose to put on righteousness each day?

Will you, as a Christian, make a conscience decision each and every day to choose to abandon sin in your life and live a righteous life?

Will you choose to do the right thing---the righteous thing---to protect yourself from the enemy’s plans to destroy and devour you?

As you enter into each new day, will you make a commitment to walk in peace and exhibit self-control, even when it seems like everyone and everything in the world is trying to steal your peace?

Will you make peace a priority in your life and your relationships, even if that meant that you don’t get your own way?

Will you choose to daily put on faith, and believe not only that that God exists, but that He is Who He claims to be in the Bible?

Are you fully convinced that there is Only One True God, one True Religion---Christianity---as it is taught in the Bible?

Each day, do you exhibit and strengthen your faith by reading the Bible to learn about God and then applying what you’ve learned to your life?

Let’s take it a step further, do your beliefs about God influence every part of your lives until you are a radical follower of Jesus Christ?

Will we go beyond words and put our faith into action making it real and alive?

Is it obvious to everyone that you are wearing your Shield of Faith because you are genuinely living your life as if God is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him?

Have you decided to “take up” or “put on” the helmet of salvation by choosing to give Salvation and all that it means control and domination of our minds?

Are you training your brain to have every thought, every action, every emotion, and every behavior to pass through the filter of “Because I am justified by Christ, I will think or do....”

Are you seeking deliverance from any demonic influences in your life that want to destroy you, your life or your family because you know that Christ provided your deliverance at the cross?

Are you living your life from an eternal perspective because your mind is wearing the Helmet of Salvation?

Are you following Jesus’ example and reading, studying, and memorizing God’s Word in preparation to use God’s Word as a mighty sword to overcome the enemy’s attacks?

You see, it’s the answers to these questions that tell you, “*Am I dressing for victory or am I storing the weapons God has given me away in a closet to be used on a special occasion?*”

Am I really obeying the Bible’s command to “*Put on the full armor of God*” or am I just pretending to be wearing the armor while I’m really storing it away in my spiritual closet?

Many of you may recall the old story called, “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen. If you’ve never heard the story, it’s basically the tale of a very vain emperor who was obsessed with wearing the latest, most fashionable clothes. Everyone in the kingdom knew that he wasted all of his time and money on such endeavors.

Then one day a group of swindlers and con men entered the kingdom and approached the king with the proposition that they could make him the finest suit of clothes ever—the only catch was that the suit was to be made of a fabric that was invisible to anyone who is unfit for his position or "hopelessly stupid".

Of course, the king agreed, but the problem was that as the swindlers went through the motions of designing, measuring, and creating the new suit of clothes, the king couldn't see them. Not wanting to admit that he may be unfit for his positions, stupid, or incompetent, the king plays along, as do all of his noblemen. In fact, everyone in the kingdom goes along with the charade and pretends that the king is wearing a beautiful suit of clothes even though it was obvious to everyone that the king was buck naked---and making an appearance in a parade none the less!

Throughout the whole kingdom, there was only one child that didn't get the memo to "pretend the king is wearing clothes even though he isn't." Not knowing any better, the child cried out, "The emperor is naked!" Soon everyone began to murmur the same thing and very soon all shouted, "The emperor is not wearing anything!"

Finally, the story ends with the saddest line of all: *"The emperor realized the truth but preferred to believe that his people were stupid."*

What does this have to do with Dressing for Victory?

Basically this, as we wrap up this series, I believe it's time that each of us examined our hearts and really asked ourselves the question, "Am I really putting on the spiritual weapons God has provided or am I imitating the stupid emperor and pretending to be wearing a suit while I'm really running around spiritually naked?"

Here's a tip: The enemy of our souls knows the truth. He's going to attack us in every area that we've left spiritually vulnerable. The only way to combat his attacks is to really and truly apply the principles we've learned about the Armor of God to our lives each and every day.

Of course, the choice is yours.

When the answers to the above questions or the challenges found in the various chapters of this series reveal obvious gaps in your armor, will you choose to make the lifestyle changes to wear the full armor of God or will you, like the emperor, choose to ignore the truth and remain spiritually naked?

You see, the question isn't "Are the clothes provided?"

We've already established that God has given us everything we need to take your stand against the enemy's evil schemes.

The question is: Will you choose to take your spiritual clothes out of the closet and put them on?

Will you Dress for Victory?

The choice is up to you.

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The Road to Freedom

By Adessa Holden

Over the past few months, I felt the Holy Spirit leading me to share part of our testimony that I've never previously shared. Let me begin by saying that I am not sharing this story with the intention of embarrassing anyone or from a spirit of unforgiveness. I truly believe that the Holy Spirit wants to use our family's testimony to help people who are struggling or living with family members who are struggling, and introduce you to the ministry that changed our lives—the ministry of spiritual deliverance.

I know that there are many who ask, “Why does your ministry place so much emphasis on spiritual deliverance?”

The answer is simple, “Because it works, and sometimes it is the only thing that works.” As further explanation, please allow me to share a portion of our story with you.

I grew up a loving, Christian family. By all appearances, my parents were both committed Christians with a strong marriage and a desire to serve God. From time to time issues would arise, but they were usually brushed under the carpet fairly quickly. To any onlooker, we appeared to be the model of functional family life.

Then around Christmas of 1996, my Dad began spiraling out of control.

Actually, he began changing a few years earlier after his Dad passed away. At first, we thought he was grieving. As he became moodier and more difficult to live with, we began seeking medical treatments to see if there was anything physical causing the changes. Eventually, it became evident that his problems were not of a physical nature—he was perfectly healthy.

By the time fall of 1996 arrived, my Mom was earnestly seeking God for a healing in their relationship and marriage. It was now obvious that there were major problems,

it just wasn't obvious what they were or how to solve them. That Christmas, after my Dad bought my Mom a very cruel, hurtful gift, it became very apparent that things could no longer be brushed away. It was time for my Dad to start dealing with the issues of his heart.

That winter he began counseling, and the pattern of going to a counselor for a few sessions and then quitting. It was a turbulent time filled with a lot of stress as counselors would touch the surface of my Dad's problems, only to have him get angry and search for another counselor. Along the way, stirring up all of these memories and emotions was causing him to begin having episodes of eruptive anger and very erratic behavior.

By the fall of 1997, my Mom and I were living a nightmare. My Dad's "anger episodes" were becoming more and more common. They were also turning violent. I remember spending nights behind locked bedroom doors waiting for him to fall asleep, go to work and calm down. You never knew what was going to set him off. After each episode, he was very remorseful and sorry, even a little shocked that it happened. Still, it didn't keep it from happening again.

On New Year's Day of 1998, he had to stay at a relative's house because his anger was completely out of control, and he got into a fight with my brother who reacted in anger because he could no longer stand the way my Mom was being treated. The next day, we began searching for a Christian treatment center to help him deal with his issues. However, because he wasn't struggling with drugs or alcohol, he could only get help on an out-patient basis.

The nightmare continued when Dad's new counselor began getting to the heart of my Dad's repressed memories and secrets. It wasn't long before Dad declared that this counselor was crazy and incompetent and he was going to find yet a different counselor. However, some of the biggest demonic influences controlling my Dad were lying, deceit and secrets. The new counselor couldn't see this. He believed my Dad's lies, and essentially told him it was time to "drop the hammer" on his family. I still remember the day that Dad came home from a counseling session and told my Mom and I that this

was the way things were going to be and if we didn't like it we could move out of HIS house.

We did leave, for a scheduled Dr's appointment, and to get away for awhile. We didn't even know if we were welcome to go back home, but having nowhere else to go, we returned. When we got home, we found my Dad sitting on the floor in my brother's room staring at the wall like a zombie. It was impossible to get him to react in any form. It was absolutely terrifying.

I don't remember how that evening ever resolved itself. The next thing I remember is that my Mom and I were asked to come into the counselor's office, where every problem in our family was blamed on us. I was absolutely horrifying being told that the erratic behavior, the violence we'd been experiencing, and the uncontrollable anger were our fault. We left that office completely devastated and wondering if God, like the counselor, was against us, blamed us, and had abandoned us.

That night when my Dad came home from work, he was brokenhearted at what the counselor had done to us. He knew as well as we did that the problems were not our fault, he just had no idea what to do to solve them. He made us dinner and decided that he was done with yet another counselor. That night, he was the man I knew growing up, not the out-of-control, demonically controlled man he'd become.

The next day, he went to work and my Mom, totally disillusioned, decided to make one last ditch attempt at finding help. She called Rev. Richard Herritt, a local pastor who had experience in spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry. As we drove to his house that day we were discussing what we were going to do with our lives. Was it time to leave my Dad and get an apartment? Was there any hope or was it time to give up? What would happen to him if we abandoned him?

When we arrived at Rev. Herritt's office, he took us through a spiritual deliverance session. Immediately, we could feel the demonic oppression breaking in our lives. We left there feeling like God did have a purpose for our lives and that He could bring us through this time. When we got home, my Dad saw such a great change in us that he went through a spiritual deliverance session the next day.

With the help of Rev. Herritt and the ministry of spiritual deliverance, our family was finally able to see the light about what was going on in our lives. Once the demonic forces were no longer able to influence and control, we were able to get to the heart of the problems in my Dad's life and in our family. Over the course of time, we learned that my Dad had many repressed memories that began forcing themselves to the surface after his father's death. We also found out that throughout his life, including the years when he was supposedly a Christian, he had been living a hypocritical, double life with many secrets.

As the secrets were revealed, each member of our family began seeing how my Dad's choices influenced each of us. Through the light of the Holy Spirit, we began seeing how things that we thought were normal, were actually very abnormal. Each of us had to face how Dad abused us in different ways, and how his lies and deceptive ways had created issues in our lives. As each truth was revealed, we had to apply the Biblical principles of facing the truth, forgiving each other, asking God to forgive us for the sin these issues allowed, and choosing to change our behavior. Deliverance didn't magically fix our problems, but I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we never could have fixed our problems without deliverance.

You see, at the root of my Dad's behavior were deep-seated emotional and psychological issues that needed to be addressed. He needed to overcome these problems if he was ever going to function normally, have healthy relationships, and become a godly man. However, before he could even face these issues, let alone deal with them Bible-based way, the demonic influences surrounding these issues had to be broken.

The Holy Spirit gave me this word picture to explain it. Let's say that the key to overcoming the issues in your life is in a giant box. If you can get to the box, and clean it out, you will find the key. The problem is that the box is covered in explosives. Anyone who gets near the box is liable to be injured by an explosion. The only way to get to the key inside of the box is to detonate the explosives.

It's the same way with the issues of our past and the sin in our lives. We know that the Bible holds the keys to our freedom. Many Christians want to grab the keys inside the box and unlock themselves from everything that holds them captive. Unfortunately, before they can get to the box they encounter the explosives of the demonic influences that have attached themselves to their issues.

Whenever they try to deal with the sin in their life or the issues of their past in a Bible-based way, they are overcome with anger, violence, depression, discouragement, feelings of hate, or an unexplained pull toward addictions. Suddenly, they are consumed by controlling or putting out these fires, and the issue you were originally trying to overcome is temporarily or permanently ignored.

What our family has learned through years of personal experience is that the ministry of spiritual deliverance will cut through the wires of explosives around the box so you can get to the key and follow the Biblically-based principles of overcoming the issues and sins in your life.

Like I said before, spiritual deliverance doesn't solve every problem and it won't relieve you of the responsibility of applying Scriptural truth to your life. What spiritual deliverance will do is remove any demonic influences that are trying to create chaos to keep you from dealing with the issues in your life. It will also break the power of any demonic influences that are holding you captive to sin or addiction. It isn't a cure all, but it is a powerful tool that will help the Christian who earnestly wants to overcome the issues from their past and the sins in their lives.

For my family, spiritual deliverance was a God-send. It completely changed our lives.

For my Mom, my brother, and myself, the ministry of spiritual deliverance turned the lights on to years of darkness of my Dad's lies and secrets. When the darkness was removed, we were able to follow the Holy Spirit into each inner healing that He had for us. Today, we are completely different people because we went through the deliverance process and applied the Biblical principles of the Bible to our lives. We are no longer controlled by abuse, anger, lying, hate or any of the issues from our past.

I wish I could say the same thing for my Dad; however, at this time, he has still not made the choice to apply the Biblical principles needed to overcome many of the issues in his life. It is our hope and prayer that he will change his mind and allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work in his life. Still, I can't say that deliverance has had no effect on him, for now whenever he ever feels that darkness or uncontrollable anger coming on him now, he knows how to get help. Along the way, he was able to uncover many of his repressed memories and his secrets were revealed. Right now, we are praying that he will choose to come to the place of full deliverance and begin applying the Biblical principles necessary to the issues in his life so that he can walking in victory over his issues.

In the meantime, I feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to share this part of our testimony with you. I truly believe that there are those who are struggling with things they cannot overcome or living with family members that are struggling with things they can't overcome. You genuinely love God and want to overcome the issues of your past and sin in your life, but you don't know how. As you're trying to learn and grow and become more like Jesus, you feel like you're in a battle. As you strive to gain the key in the box, you're feeling the effects of the explosives and wondering, "Can I ever overcome?"

To you, I want to offer the possibility of the ministry of spiritual deliverance. It isn't scary or spooky, and it doesn't mean that you're a bad Christian. The fact is that we live in a world filled with unprecedented spiritual warfare. It is virtually impossible to be unaffected. However, it is completely possible to fight and win. This is simply one of the weapons available to help Christians fight their battles. For our family, it was a key to victory and freedom. Wanting to see everyone experience this same freedom, I felt led to share this portion of our testimony with you.

At this point, many of you may be asking, "How can I connect with a pastor who is experienced in this type of ministry?" Well, if your church does not have a minister who is trained and experienced in this type of ministry, I encourage you to visit Herritt Spiritual Warfare Ministries at www.conquerors-in-christ.org. This website will give you further information as well as the phone number to contact this ministry. I am

sure that Rev. Herritt will be happy to pray a prayer of deliverance with you, or help you find someone in your area to lead you through a spiritual deliverance session. In many cases, he is praying with people and providing counseling over the phone to those who are in need. If you're looking for help in breaking the demonic strongholds in your life, this website is a great place to start.

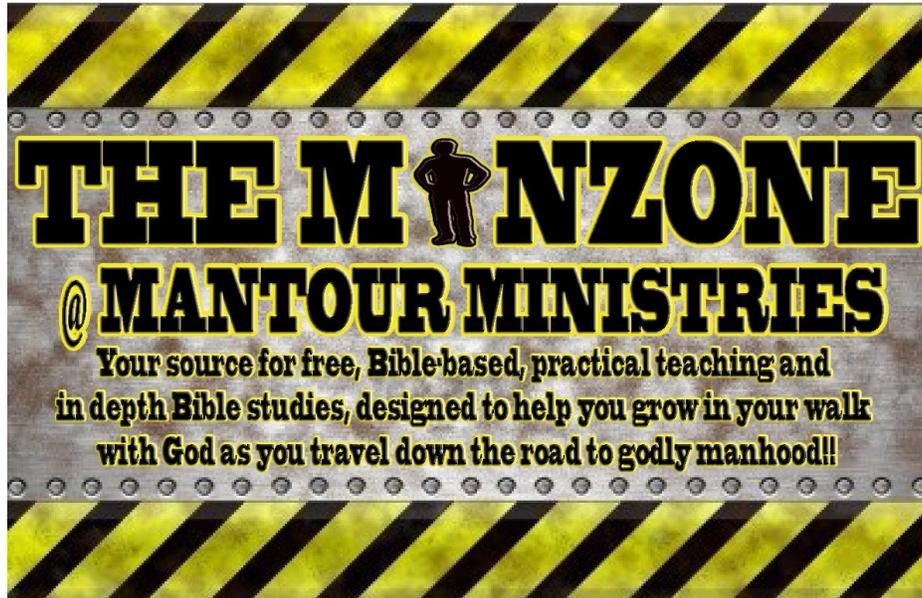
Maybe you're still questioning and would like to know more about spiritual warfare and spiritual warfare ministry. Perhaps this testimony has perked your interest, but you still want more information. Then I encourage you to read either "The Three Battlegrounds" by Francis Frangipane or "Fight" by Kenny Luck. Both of these books will help you understand spiritual deliverance and how it can be applied to the life of every Christian. Of course, you can always feel free to contact my brother Jamie at Jamie@mantourministries.com with any questions or for further information on this topic. We'll be glad to help you in any way possible as you seek to find your road to freedom and victory in Christ.

Like I said before, I don't know what our family would have done if we had not been introduced to the ministry of spiritual deliverance. It was the form of treatment the Holy Spirit chose to heal the diseases in our hearts. It detonated the explosions so that we could get to the root of the issues in our lives, overcome them, and learn to live in the freedom of Christ. I would recommend it to any Christian that wants to overcome the issues from their past and move forward with God into the future.

If you get anything from our family's testimony, I pray that it will encourage you to seriously and prayerfully consider the ministry of spiritual deliverance in your own life or your family's life. It worked for us, and I believe it will work for any believer who sincerely wants to be free from the demonic influences in their lives so they can wholeheartedly follow God.

Jamie Holden can be contacted at Jamie@mantourministries.com

Feel free to send any questions, comments, or requests for speaking engagements.



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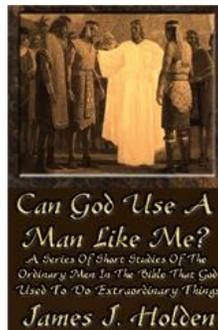
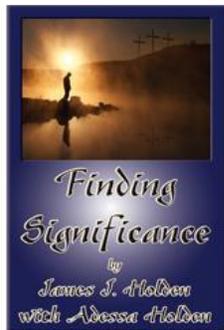
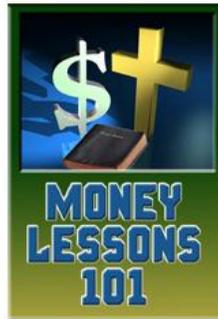
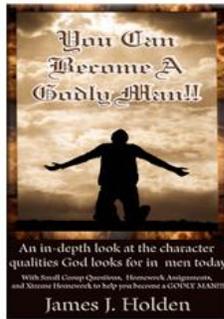
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