Session 13

Walking to Battle

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

Ephesians 6:10-20

Memory Verse: Ephesians 6:11

Read Ephesians 6:10-20, First Thoughts (p. 134), and Understand the Context (pp. 134–135). As you read, reflect on what you’ve learned from the Book of Ephesians this quarter.

Study Ephesians 6:10-20, using Explore the Text on pages 135–139. Spend time reviewing the Key Doctrine (The Scriptures). For more study helps, consult the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.

Plan group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 140–141), More Ideas (p. 142), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Add variety to your plans for your group in this session by using at least one idea from More Ideas.

Gain insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

Gather the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; and ☐ Several pieces of sports equipment that all go with the same sport and one item that doesn’t. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: ☐ Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians); and have ☐ Pack Item 5 (Poster: The Armor of God) prepared to display, but don’t show it to your group until after they’ve read Ephesians 6:14-17. Make copies of: ☐ Pack Item 11 (Handout: Armor in Ephesians).
**KEY DOCTRINE**

*The Scriptures*

The Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction (Ps. 19:7-10).

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**BIBLE SKILL**

Read passages related by theme.

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

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**FIRST THOUGHTS**

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

(In PSG, p. 118) **What are some of the reasons people run from a battle? Why would someone run to it?**

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**EPHESIANS 6:10-20**

The Roman military not only conquered the territories held by Rome, they safeguarded the liberties of its citizens in cities across the empire. The military was composed only of soldiers who were citizens. Many of these soldiers enlisted in order to gain citizenship to the Roman Empire. When not involved in war, the Roman army performed many civic duties, such as construction, maintenance, or other peacekeeping duties.

The main foot-soldier had two weapons at his disposal. Each soldier had a lance, which was over three-feet long and had an iron point. He also carried a sword for hand-to-hand combat. The soldier would often throw the lance and then draw his sword for combat. These offensive weapons were supplemented with a defensive weapon: a wooden shield. The shield was oval and covered in leather. It protected the soldier during combat, and the wooden nature of the shield extinguished flaming arrows that were directed at the soldier.

The clothing of the soldier served various functions. During combat the soldier wore a metal helmet, protecting this crucial part of the body from the lance or the sword. A breastplate covered the heart and was usually made of metal over a kilt of leather. Sometimes the shoulder area and lower legs were protected by metal armor, and the shoes were often spiked sandals that allowed traction for the soldier as he advanced in battle.

Though Romans soldiers were generally regarded negatively by the Jews (Luke 3:14), Jesus once expressed amazement at a Roman soldier’s faith (Matt. 8:5-13). A soldier was among the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit in Caesarea (Acts 10). Paul was often imprisoned under their watch, and he preached the gospel to those who held him captive (Phil. 1:13). As Paul thought of the battle between the forces of God and the forces of evil
at work in his life, he used the imagery of a soldier’s army to help Christians prepare for the battle.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

VERSE 10
Paul had previously spoken of the old self and the new self (Eph. 4:17-24). Though the old self died when Christ came to live in a Christian’s life, the believer still had to put off the effects of the old self. Similarly, Satan was defeated by Christ on the cross and victory is secured in our lives when we come to know Jesus. However, that does not mean that the devil will quit fighting battles. He is defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ, but believers must still be aware of his evil ways of deceit.

Because of this ongoing battle, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be strengthened by the Lord. As we yield to the Lord, He supplies his vast strength to give us victory in battle. This same expression was used in Ephesians 1:19-20 to describe the divine power that brought about Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation. The bad news is that we have spiritual battles to face on earth. The good news is that we can be strengthened by the Lord’s mighty power. If He can raise Christ from the dead, He can protect us in battle.

VERSE 11-12
The way to stand in the power of the Lord is to put on the full armor of God. In addition to relying upon their relationship with the Lord, Christians are to appropriate the divine gifts He has given us for the battle. The Christian soldier needed the full armor of God to ensure protection from head to foot. This included all of the armor, both that which was defensive and that which was offensive. Failure to place any of these pieces of armor on the Christian would leave the spiritual soldier exposed to the attack of the enemy.

The method of the enemy’s attack is described in verse 11 as schemes. The English word methods is derived from this Greek word for schemes. It implied subtle, strategic tactics. Paul had previously used the word in Ephesians 4:14, where he spoke of the subtle attempt of the false prophets to lead people astray. No doubt Satan was behind those attempts, and in this passage the devil is responsible for strategic attempts to defeat Christians. The devil is evil and also intelligent. He carefully strategizes ways to attack the people of God to minimize their influence and make them feel the battle is lost, even if it has been conquered by Christ in His death and resurrection.

Christians often think their biggest struggles are with other people, and so they lash out at them or battle against them. Paul reminded the Ephesians that their battle was not against flesh and blood. This was a way of emphasizing that the battle was not with people. Certainly Satan has used people to carry out his schemes, but the ultimate battle is not with those people.

VERSES 10-12

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

The real battle is with rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of this darkness, and evil spiritual forces in the heavens. These are demonic forces under the direction of Satan. He uses them to scheme against believers and cause defeat in their lives. The battle is not against Satan alone but against various powerful evil forces of varying rank, authority, and capabilities. Satan is cunning, well-organized, and well-equipped to inflict damage upon those spiritual soldiers not prepared for the battle.

Why is it important to recognize that the battle is not between us and other people?

VERSE 13
13 For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

VERSES 14-15
14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

PREPARED (EPH. 6:14-17)

VERSE 13
In light of verse 12, Paul urged believers to take up the full armor of God. This is now the second time in this section he has encouraged such action (v. 11). The hope of the believer is not to outsmart the enemy or to overpower him. The hope of the believer comes in appropriating the armor God has made available to the soldier for the battle. In verse 11 Paul used a word meaning “be clothed in,” and here he used a word that meant to “take up or assume.” Believers are to clothe themselves in spiritual armor and then appropriate it into their lives for battle.

Having clothed himself with armor, the spiritual soldier must resist the enemy. This was a compound word that meant to stand against. It does not imply standing there and taking his assault but offering resistance to his assault. The evil day probably is representative of the day of that attack, not some future experience of evil assault. The secret to withstanding the assault of the devil is in the preparation. Having prepared everything, the Christian soldier would now stand in the mighty power of the Lord and resist the enemy’s attack.
devil is a liar and operates through lies (John 8:44), the belt of truth is the foundational piece of armor in the attack.

Paul also encouraged Christian soldiers to put on righteousness like armor on your chest. This was a reference to the breastplate, which covered the chest from the neck to the thighs. Again, Paul drew his imagery from the Old Testament, where Isaiah 59:17 stated: “He put on righteousness as body armor.” In this passage it was the Lord who girded Himself for battle and fought the decisive battle of victory. Now in Ephesians, Paul encouraged the soldier to put on that same armor piece that led to victory. By putting on righteousness, the soldier does not give an inch or a foothold to the devil in the battle. Righteous living closes doors to temptation and the schemes of the devil. But that righteous living is made available only by the gift of righteousness given through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

Paul also encouraged believers to have their feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. Jewish historian Josephus described soldiers’ shoes as thickly studded with sharp nails. Good shoes were vital to the success of an army because they traveled many miles from battle to battle. They also traveled tough terrain at times. The shoes represented the readiness or preparedness of the soldier. But what was the soldier prepared to do? He was prepared to announce the gospel of peace. He was speaking victory over the battle, announcing that it had already been won through the gospel. Here Paul may have been recalling the words of Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” In the midst of warfare, the soldier needs the reminder that peace has already come through the gospel. The battle will not last forever.

VERSE 16
Until this point Paul has only emphasized articles of clothing, but in verse 16 he encouraged the soldier to take up the shield of faith. Paul had repeatedly emphasized the necessity of exercising one’s faith in God and Jesus in Ephesians (Eph. 1:13,15,19; 2:8; 3:12; 6:23). This was not the content of one’s belief but belief and trust in the Lord. In the Old Testament, God is spoken of as a shield around His people (Pss. 18:30; 28:7; Prov. 30:5). Paul was encouraging the Ephesians to put their faith in the Lord as a shield.

To go into battle without faith leaves the believer exposed to fear, worry, or panic.

Greek had two words for shield. One was a small shield that covered only minimal parts of the body, and the other was a full-body shield. This is the one used here. Faith in God covered the entire soldier as he went into battle. To go into battle without faith leaves the believer exposed to fear, worry, or panic. The shield was made of wood covered in leather, and flaming arrows would have embedded themselves in the shield, extinguishing their fire. In this way Paul said that the shield of faith would extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
VERSE 17
17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

VERSE 17
Paul urged the spiritual soldier to put on the **helmet of salvation**. Like the breastplate of righteousness, this piece of armor was also mentioned in Isaiah 59:17. Roman helmets were made of iron or bronze with cheek guards and an inside lining of sponge to make the weight tolerable. In Isaiah 59:17 it was the mighty warrior Yahweh who wore the helmet. He alone achieved victory over the devil through the death of Christ on the cross. Here, spiritual warriors are required to wear a helmet as well. It is not a different helmet but the helmet of salvation achieved for them by Jesus.

The final weapon mentioned in the spiritual warrior’s armor is the **sword of the Spirit**. In Isaiah 11:4, the Messiah was portrayed as the One who struck the ruthless with a scepter from his mouth. In this vein, Paul described the sword of the Spirit as the **word of God**. As Jesus used the words of Scripture to drive back the assault of His enemy during the temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4,7,10), we also have the authority to stand against Satan’s evil designs by standing in the power of God’s Word.

How have you used God’s Word as an offensive weapon against Satan?

The Spirit is with the person praying, inspires the person to pray, guides the person in what to pray, and energizes him or her to keep praying.

FIELD SUPPORT (EPH. 6:18-20)

VERSE 18
18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

VERSE 18
In addition to armor and weapons, the soldier has at his disposal field support. The first level of field support is prayer. Paul told soldiers everywhere to **pray at all times**. The wise soldier sharpens his prayer life before the battle even arrives. Both preparation and engagement in battle require prayer. Prayer must be offered in the **Spirit**. The form of the Greek word emphasizes the means by which prayer is offered. The Spirit is with the person praying, inspires the person to pray, guides the person in what to pray, and energizes him or her to keep praying. People can pray in the flesh, but it is ineffective. Effective prayer must be offered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul used different words for prayer. Believers should offer **prayer**, a general word for prayer, and make **request**, which is the more specific word for intercession. When the battle is fierce, all kinds of prayer should be offered to the Lord. Prayer requires **perseverance**. Those who are fighting the battle are depending upon the prayers of others, and prayer warriors cannot fall asleep at the task.
VERSES 19-20

Paul was engaged in battle at that very moment, imprisoned for preaching the gospel. He humbly asked that the believers pray also for him. He did not ask them to pray for his release, but that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. Paul did not pray for deliverance from the battle but success in the midst of battle. Prayer should be centered upon the advance of the gospel more than the safety of those who are advancing it with their words and lives. Like the apostles before him (Acts 4:29), Paul did not shrink in fear but desired to speak with confidence about the power of Jesus to save those who had imprisoned him. His battle was not with the soldiers who held him (Eph. 6:12) but with the schemes of the devil that attempted to silence him with chains.

Why should our prayers, even in a battle, be gospel-focused?

In Paul’s battle, he was an ambassador in chains. He had once before used the idea of ambassador to describe his role in taking the gospel to the lost. He stated, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: ‘Be reconciled to God’” (2 Cor. 5:20). Paul’s passion to take the gospel to the lost drips from this verse. An ambassador lives in a foreign land but represents his home country. Paul saw himself as a stranger in the lands he traveled to take the gospel, and he desired to deliver the message of his home kingdom—the kingdom of God. Though he was an ambassador, he was in battle. He was in chains for preaching the gospel.

The heat of battle is not the time to shrink in fear and silence the gospel message.

For a second time (v. 20), Paul asked for prayer that he would be able to speak about the gospel as he should. The pronoun it is a reference back to the gospel mentioned in the verse 19. Paul prayed that God would grant him boldness to speak of Jesus even in the battle. The heat of battle is not the time to shrink in fear and silence the gospel message. The gospel had brought victory to his life, and in the battle he wanted others to hear of victory in Christ.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, call attention to several pieces of sports equipment (or pictures of them) associated with the same sport, such as football pads, cleats, and a helmet. Also include something in the display that has nothing to do with football, such as a gardening trowel. Ask: Based on these items, what sport am I getting ready to play? Which item doesn’t belong?

EXPLAIN: It’s important that every player who gets out on the field is not only protected but is prepared to play his or her specific position. And sometimes what you don’t carry with you is every bit as important as what you do. No one would bring a gardening trowel to the line of scrimmage.

REVIEW: Discuss key points from Understand the Context (pp. 134–135; PSG, p. 119). Refer to Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians) to review what you’ve studied this quarter.

TRANSITION: As we study, pay attention to all the resources God provides to believers in order for them to live Christlike lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:10-13. Point out that verse 11 is the memory verse for this session. Lead the group in reciting the verse.

EXPLAIN: Notice that Paul doesn’t say “strengthen yourselves in the Lord,” but “be strengthened by the Lord” (v. 10). We can’t win spiritual battles in our own strength but only in the strength the Lord gives us. (Refer to paragraph under Verse 10, PSG, p. 120)

ASK: Why does it matter that believers in Christ clearly understand that their walk in Him includes facing spiritual conflict? What dangers exist if the believer fails to recognize the possibility of spiritual battles? (PSG, p. 122)

STATE: Call attention to verse 12 and what it says about who we are and are not fighting against. Using the information in this leader guide (p. 135), emphasize that the point isn’t to try to figure out the distinctions between spirit beings but that we aren’t fighting other human beings.

ASK: Why do you think it matters that we take up the whole armor of God? Draw attention back to the sports equipment display from the Focus Attention step, and discuss the consequences of not being fully protected in a football game.

TRANSITION: Notice the word “prepared” in verse 13. That leads us to our next point: Once you’re aware, you must be prepared.

READ: Direct the group to read silently Ephesians 6:14-17, guiding them to form a mental picture of each piece of armor as they read about it. After they have formed their mental picture, display Pack Item 5 (Poster: The Armor of God). Instruct the group to identify and label what each piece of armor spiritually represents (examples: the belt equals truth; the helmet equals salvation).
GUIDE: Direct the group’s attention to Pack Item 11 (Handout: Armor in Ephesians). Lead the group to discuss the functions of each piece of armor and why Paul compared each piece to the specific quality of Christian character that he did. Call on volunteers to share about a time in their lives when they most felt the reality of spiritual warfare. Encourage them to share how they were able to achieve victory in those circumstances. Refer to other Scriptures that describe spiritual warfare, such as 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 and 1 Peter 5:8-9. Emphasize that every passage that deals with spiritual warfare assures us of victory.

ASK: What might keep a believer from utilizing the armor God provides for fighting spiritual battles? What responsibility do we have in preparing for spiritual battle? (PSG, p. 124)

TRANSITION: It might surprise you that Paul didn’t list prayer as part of the armor of God. But this doesn’t mean prayer isn’t important in spiritual warfare.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:18-20. Direct the group to be listening for the answers to the “Five W’s” about prayer: who, what, when, where, and why.

DISCUSS: For whom does Paul say to pray? When do we pray? What do we pray for? How should we pray? Why do we pray?

EXPLAIN: Being strengthened in the Lord depends on what God does for us and not what we’re able to do for ourselves. In the same way, even our prayers to God are empowered by Him. That’s what it means to pray “in the Spirit” (v. 18). It’s carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

DIRECT: Invite the group to take out their smartphones and set an alarm for either 6:18 a.m. or 6:18 p.m. tomorrow. Explain that the alarm serves as a reminder to pray according to Ephesians 6:18—“at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request.” Challenge them to do this not just for a day, but every day this next week.

DISCUSS: Why do you think Paul picked this moment to remind the Ephesians that he was in prison for the sake of the gospel? Suggest it could be that Paul earnestly desired their prayer. But it also served to remind them of the high stakes of spiritual warfare and why prayer is so important.

ASK: How does knowing others are praying help a person face spiritual battles? (PSG, p. 125)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

CHALLENGE: Form pairs of the same gender and direct each pair to review the statements from In My Context (PSG, p. 126). Lead partners to ask each other the questions in the second question set: What spiritual battles are you currently facing? What needs to be “put on” to face these battles?

PRAY: Direct pairs to spend time with one another in prayer. Encourage them to exchange phone numbers if they don’t have each other’s numbers already and commit to texting their partners in the middle of next week to remind them that they’re praying for them.
PRACTICE

- Contact any group members who were absent from this session. Let them know a major part of the study was about praying for one another, and ask if there’s anything you can pray with them about.
- Text everyone who attended this session at 6:18 p.m. every day this week to let them know you’re praying for them.
- Send an email or text to all group members, reminding them that you’ll be beginning a new unit of study next week on Numbers and Deuteronomy. This is a great time to invite someone to your small group.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, invite the group to introduce themselves by sharing their favorite hobby or recreational activity. (This is especially effective for a group who may have a lot of newcomers.) After hearing about various hobbies and activities, pick a few volunteers and ask them to name what kind of equipment or tools people need to engage in that activity.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To further emphasize the point that our strength for spiritual warfare is from the Lord, call attention to the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 121). Call on volunteers to look up the verses listed to discover what the Bible says about God as the primary warrior.
- To enhance your discussion of Ephesians 6:14-17, invite a police officer, firefighter, or soldier to bring their protective equipment to your group and walk through the importance of each piece of equipment.
- To enhance the study of Ephesians 6:18-20, trade the names of people in your group with the names of people from another group in your church that also uses Explore the Bible. Lead your group to pray for members of the other group by name, and let them know the other group is doing the same thing for them.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

On the board or a large sheet of paper, lead the group to create a list of action points from Ephesians 6:10-20. Ask: What are some things believers can do in order to “put on the full armor of God” (v. 11)? Which of these can you do this week?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play the song “Christ Is Risen,” by Matt Maher, as a reminder that the ultimate victory in spiritual warfare has already been won by Christ. For a more traditional alternative, close by reading the words to the hymn, “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” by Sabine Baring-Gould.