

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 56** and ask **Question #1: What are some “tools” you rely on most days?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG, page 57** to the example of the TV show *MacGyver*. Explain to those who may not know, how the main character would use ordinary objects such as paper clips and chewing gum as tools to save the day.

SAY: “Wouldn’t it be great if we could deal with life’s problems with ordinary household items?”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 57: God equips us for the spiritual battles we face.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to open our eyes to the reality of spiritual warfare and to show us how to fight spiritual battles wearing the armor of God.

SESSION 5

BATTLE ARMOR



The Point

God equips us for the spiritual battles we face.

The Bible Meets Life

Satan does not like it when we choose to follow and obey Christ. The great enemy of God will seek to defeat us, pull us from full devotion to Christ, and make us ineffective.

Thankfully, we are not left alone to face this great enemy. As His children, God gives us His Holy Spirit to be with us, and He equips us with everything we need to stand against Satan.

The Passage

Ephesians 6:10-20

The Setting

Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, most likely written around A.D. 60-61 during an imprisonment in Rome, is one of four letters called “Prison” or “Captivity” letters (including *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*). Paul briefly noted his imprisonment in this letter (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). A key topic in this letter is the spiritual armor we need to fight our spiritual battles.

Ephesians 6:10-13

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

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

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

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

We are in a spiritual battle.

1 ▶ **Verse 10.** In Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus he tackled a wide range of ethical issues in chapters 4 to 6. In the last major section of this letter, Paul focused on the Christian life as a spiritual battle. He began by emphasizing our need to **be strengthened by the Lord**. The theme of finding strength in the Lord appears in the Old Testament as well (1 Sam. 30:6; Zech. 10:12). All Christians need to be prepared for the spiritual warfare that will occur in their lives. When Christians face significant challenges, we sometimes fall back to our old habits of trying to solve the problems on our own instead of looking to God for help.

Paul emphasized that we need to rely on God’s **vast strength**, literally “the power of His might.” Paul had previously described this power in Ephesians 1:19-20 as “the immeasurable greatness of his power” by which God raised Christ from the dead. He also had prayed that the Ephesian believers would be strengthened with this power in their inner being through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16).

Ultimately we need to depend on God to live the Christian life well. God may help us in many ways, but we need to remember and trust that God will sustain us and protects us. From the human level we might think our help comes from a passage from the Bible, the encouraging words of a good Christian friend, or the words of a song or hymn. Behind these resources is the providential activity of the Lord. Paul described this God-centered perspective on his life in 1 Corinthians 15:10: “By the grace of God I am what I am.” ◀

STUDY THE BIBLE Ephesians 6:10-13



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Bible Meets Life** and **The Setting** on page 62.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:10-13.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to explain that we are in a spiritual battle and need God’s power:

- *Be strengthened by the Lord (we need His help, His power)*
Joshua 1:7
1 Samuel 30:6
Zechariah 10:12
- *“By His vast strength” (literally, “the power of His might”)*
Ephesians 1:19-20
Ephesians 3:16

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Lead a member of the group to read the words of the first verse of “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary **2** to explain the following phrases:

- “Put on the full armor of God” (more details in verses 14-17)
- “Stand” or take your stand—“is to hold one’s ground against the enemy, to resist one’s foe and . . . prevail over the enemy”
- “Schemes of the devil”—our primary enemy is the devil

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 58-59** to author’s comments about the “schemes of the devil.”

- He attacks strategically
- He knows how to target us.
- He is tactical, methodical
- We are not to be ignorant of his schemes (2 Cor. 2:11)

SAY: “Satan is strategic, scheming and organized. Satan is not like God, however; he is not:

- omnipotent (all powerful)
- omniscient (all knowing)
- omnipresent (in all places).”

2 ▶ **Verse 11.** To prepare for our spiritual battles, we need the **full armor of God**. Paul and his original readers would have been very familiar with the armor of Roman soldiers. While Paul was imprisoned, he probably had a Roman guard stationed near him at all times, sometimes possibly chained to a guard. So Paul would have been very aware of the armor worn by the Roman soldiers!

Bible scholars suggest that the armor of God might have two meanings. First, it could be armor that God provides to His people for their protection during spiritual warfare. Second, it might refer to the armor Scripture describes God Himself wearing. This second view is supported by Isaiah 59:17, which mentions God’s “body armor” and “helmet.” Both meanings could fit here, since the main point is that our protection in battles comes from God.

The purpose of putting on the full armor of God is so that believers may **stand**. To *stand* is to hold one’s ground against an enemy, to resist one’s foe and in so doing prevail over that enemy. It is the believer’s job to stand firm against the attacks of the devil and his allies so as to defend and hold on to that which has been won.

Our primary foe in our battles is the **devil**. Paul mentioned the devil or Satan often in his letters. For instance, the devil is deceptive, disguising himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). The devil has many **schemes**. The serpent in the garden of Eden that tempted Adam and Eve, later identified as the devil (Rev. 12:9), was “the most cunning” of the animals (Gen. 3:1). When I think of a battle, I have a mental picture of armies facing each other on an open field. Paul might have been saying the devil specializes at times in sneak attacks or ambushes. He has a wide range of tactics to use against us, and we need God’s strength in these battles. ◀

3 ▶ **Verse 12.** Our spiritual battles involve more than just the devil. He has a great many allies who are also our enemies and are not human beings of **flesh and blood**. While individuals and institutions can and do oppose Christians and their work to spread the gospel, our primary opponents are spiritual and supernatural. Paul used several terms to describe these spiritual enemies. Some of our enemies are **rulers** and **authorities**. Paul mentioned these same entities in Ephesians 1:21 in describing the supremacy of Christ over all such powers. The **cosmic powers of this darkness** refers to those evil spiritual powers (demonic forces) in rebellion against God who have authority in the

world. Believers have been brought out of the darkness of this present age into the light through Christ. The **evil, spiritual forces in the heavens** is a broad, general description of all evil spiritual beings and relates to Paul's comment in Ephesians 2:2 describing the devil as the "ruler of the power of the air." ◀

4 ▶ Verse 13. Because such an array of spiritual forces stand against believers, the **full armor of God** is essential for the spiritual battles Christians must fight. We must always be prepared for these battles by taking up this armor. These battles occur in **the evil day**, which might refer to any time in our Christian pilgrimage in "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), or it might highlight particular crises when we are most vulnerable to the devil's attacks.

We must be ready to **resist** or withstand the devil and his allies. A key idea in this verse is Paul's command to **take your stand** (see v. 11). Paul knew that in military battles a soldier had options. He could attack the enemy, defend himself, or retreat. A Christian must stand his or her ground in the sense of being alert and prepared to face these spiritual foes.

Throughout this text Paul used the word picture of a battle for the Christian life. Depending on your current life situation and spiritual maturity, this military imagery might speak to you well. Even if you do not feel like you are in a spiritual war zone, Paul wanted you to be prepared. Indeed, your comfort zone might mean the devil has lulled you into complacency about the life and death issues we face today. ◀

Ephesians 6:14-17

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

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

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

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

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on page 64 and this page to define who our enemy is in this spiritual battle:

- *Rulers and Authorities*
- *Cosmic powers of this darkness*
- *Evil spiritual forces in the heavens*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to summarize this word picture of the battle for the Christian life.

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 59): What have you been taught about spiritual warfare?

(Alternate: How do we discern between a spiritual attack and just living in a fallen world?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses the armor of God is described in detail."

STUDY THE BIBLE ***Ephesians 6:14-17***



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:14-17.

LEADER PACK: Direct

attention to **Item 5: Armor of God** and point to specific parts of the armor as you provide details to explain the passage.



GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 60-61** to overview the armor of God:

1. Belt of truth
2. Breastplate of righteousness
3. Feet sandaled with readiness
4. Shield of faith
5. Helmet of salvation
6. Sword of the Spirit

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** to give further insight to the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to give further insight to the “feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.”

God equips us and protects us completely.

5 ▶ **Verse 14.** Again encouraging believers to **stand** (vv. 11,13), Paul gave us the details about how we could prepare for battle with our spiritual enemies. He identified the different pieces of armor a Roman soldier wore, using each piece to represent an aspect of the Christian life.

The **truth** is represented by a **belt**. Two meanings have been suggested for what Paul was referencing by truth. First, truth could be referring to the truth of the gospel of Christ based on the truth of God’s Word. Our proclamation of the Christian message is central to our spiritual warfare. A second meaning is that the truth could be referring to our ethical behavior as believers, how we live out our Christian lives. The soldier’s belt provided support and enabled him to move freely and quickly. To gird up your loins (KJV) meant to get ready for action.

On our chests we wear **righteousness** as armor. Similar imagery appears in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 and Isaiah 59:17 describes God having “righteousness as body armor.” The term *righteousness* often refers to God’s righteousness. Paul usually stressed that we are all sinners, and our righteousness is a gift from God (Rom 3:21-26). However, here the term probably meant living out the righteousness of Christ in one’s personal life and in support of the cause of justice in the world. ◀

6 ▶ **Verse 15.** Our **feet** are to be sandaled with **readiness for the gospel of peace** (see Isa. 52:7). A soldier needed to have firm footing in order to fight effectively. The Greek term for *readiness* is used in the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) for a stand or base (foundation). The believer stands on the gospel of Jesus Christ. “Those who must at all costs stand their ground need to have a secure footing; in the spiritual conflict, this is supplied by the gospel, appropriated and proclaimed.”¹

The *peace* Paul referred to is brought about through Christ, encompassing the peace between God and His people based on their salvation from their sins as well as the peace that should mark our relations with others. Paul described God as the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33), and he urged Christians to work for peace in their relationships (12:18). ◀

7 ▶ **Verse 16.** An important part of a soldier’s equipment was his **shield**. The crucial nature of this shield is seen in

that it is to be used **in every situation**. Paul used a Greek word that referred to a large shield that would cover much of the soldier's body and protect him from the **flaming arrows** of the enemy. This shield represents our **faith**. In this context *faith* describes the personal, complete trust we are to have in God. The **evil one** is one of Paul's names for the devil. ◀

8 ▶ Verse 17. Paul wrapped up his catalogue of the pieces of armor with two final items. We have the **helmet of salvation**, which is part of God's armor in Isaiah 59:17. Head injuries can be very serious and life-threatening. The helmet of salvation reminds us that our ultimate protection is God, who has provided our salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:5). It is an accomplished fact on which we can depend. The helmet of salvation also reminds us that through our salvation in Christ we have the power to overcome sin and the devil in our personal lives.

The last piece of the believer's battle gear is the **sword of the Spirit**. This sword is the only offensive weapon mentioned in Paul's list of equipment for spiritual battle. It reminds us of the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The sword of the Spirit is identified specifically as the **word of God**. Christians today especially think of the "word" of God as the written Word, the Bible. Paul certainly affirmed God's inspiration of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16). One of the best examples of the way the written Word of God can help us in spiritual warfare is the account of Jesus' temptations. Jesus successfully responded to each of the devil's temptations by quoting the Book of Deuteronomy (Matt. 4:1-10).

The Bible can help us in our spiritual battles in several ways. A systematic study of the Bible will give us a comprehensive understanding of the major events, personalities, and themes of the Bible. The memorization of Scripture is another useful spiritual discipline. Once memorized, Christians can then reflect on these verses when the Bible is not handy. They can also mention these verses when talking about spiritual issues in witnessing situations. Like Jesus, we can use the verses we know well to help us resist the devil's attacks and temptations.

While personal Bible study is essential preparation for spiritual battles, we can also benefit from study of the Word of God with fellow believers. Small-group Bible studies allow for discussion and often contribute examples of application of Bible passages to everyday life. Public worship services can also help us understand the Bible, especially when the sermons involve serious engagement with the Bible. ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 7 on page 66 and this page to give further insight to "the shield of faith."

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 8 to give further insight to "the helmet of salvation" and "the sword of the Spirit."

DISCUSS: **Question #3**

(PSG, p. 61): How do these pieces of armor help you in a spiritual battle?

GUIDE: Ask a volunteer to read the quote from *Pilgrim's Progress* on **PSG page 62**.

Then summarize the point of the quote.

DISCUSS: **Question #4**

(PSG, p. 62): What are some real-life situations in which this armor is essential for Christ-followers?

(Alternate: Which piece of God's armor most resonates with you?)

TRANSITION: "Wearing the armor is not enough. You must do one other essential thing ... *Pray.*"

STUDY THE BIBLE

Ephesians 6:18-20



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:18-20.

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 63** and highlight these key statements about prayer:

- *We are to stay in constant communication with the One we serve.*
- *Prayer is more than communication with God; it's our communion with Him.*
- *Pray at all times; continually.*
- *Pray for others.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 9** on this page and page 69 to give further insight to the importance of prayer and what it means to "pray at all times."

Ephesians 6:18-20

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.

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

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

Equipped by God, we can act with boldness and confidence.

9 ▶ **Verse 18.** Paul knew that prayer was crucial to victory in the spiritual battles the believer faced and to the Christian life as a whole. Therefore, believers should **pray at all times**. Paul encouraged believers to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17). Paul most likely did not mean non-stop praying, but surely he wanted all Christians to pray regularly. We might have specific times of day we set aside for prayer, but we can offer a prayer many times throughout the day.

Christians should also pray **in the Spirit**. The Holy Spirit resides inside every believer (Rom. 8:9-11). He intercedes on behalf of believers (vv. 26-27) and we should always seek His assistance when we pray. In prayer, Christians are to partner with the Holy Spirit, praying under His guidance and influence. In fact, the entire Christian life is to be lived in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25).

Because believers are in a spiritual battle, we need to develop an attitude of alertness and perseverance when it comes to our prayer lives (see Col. 4:2). To remain **alert** means having an attitude of constant vigilance. **Perseverance** in prayer requires being consistent and disciplined in one's prayer life. **Every prayer and request** we make should be consistent with the will of God and His expectations for us. Sometimes we are tempted to create a wish list and present it to God. These items might reflect our selfish desires rather than our real needs.

Among our prayer concerns should be **intercession** for all the saints. *Intercession* is one type of prayer that refers to praying for God to address the needs of other Christians. Because Paul traveled widely and corresponded with multiple churches, he had a solid appreciation for the needs of other Christians. Some Christians have prayer lists which include family, friends, and situations around the globe. ◀

Verse 19. Paul wanted his readers to pray for him as well. Although Paul had mentioned he was imprisoned as he wrote this letter (Eph. 3:1; 4:1), he had not mentioned his situation in detail. He wanted his readers to pray that he would preach with **boldness the mystery of the gospel**. Luke reported that Paul did indeed preach boldly (Acts 28:30-31).

Paul normally used the word *mystery* to refer to a truth that had been hidden until God revealed it to His people. Earlier in this letter the mystery now revealed was the *gospel*, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, intended for both Gentiles and Jews (Eph. 3:3-7).

Verse 20. Paul reminded his readers that he was a prisoner, describing himself as **an ambassador in chains**. Today we think of an *ambassador* as a representative of one country to another government. Paul saw himself as Christ's representative sent around the world to preach the gospel (2 Cor. 5:20). Now, however, Paul was a prisoner in chains. Even though his travel was restricted, he wanted to continue to **be bold** in his ministry. The Greek term for *bold* carries the sense of a freedom in speaking, of being blunt and outspoken.

Paul's prayer request to his readers was not self-centered. Surely he would rather have been liberated from jail so he could preach and plant churches. In Philippians, another prison letter, he acknowledged that the gospel was still being proclaimed by others while he was in jail (Phil. 1:12-20) and that he was having an impact on the "whole imperial guard" of the Roman emperor (v. 13).

In this passage, Paul's use of the image of a soldier equipped for battle is an important one for Christians, reminding us that God and His people are opposed by powerful unseen adversaries. Paul's emphasis on spiritual armor, prayer, and a bold witness are crucial to our success in this spiritual battle. We do not fight on our own. We should not retreat or deny our faith. We must trust God to empower and equip us for the struggles we face.

1. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 408.

SUMMARIZE: Use content from **Bible Commentary** on verses 19-20 to give further explanation to the following phrases:

- *Make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel*
- *Ambassador in chains*

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 64): How does prayer contribute to our efforts in spiritual warfare?

(Alternate: What keeps us from actively engaging in spiritual warfare?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Put On the Armor of God**" on **PSG page 64**.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Lead the group in a conversation about how you can help one another in the area of spiritual warfare.

LIVE IT OUT**5 minutes**

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: God equips us for the spiritual battles we face.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 65)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that spiritual warfare is a reality we often ignore. God has equipped us for battle, but we are to put on the armor and be prepared to stand firm against the enemy.

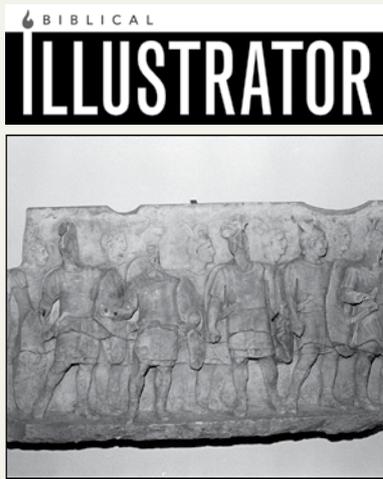
PRAY: "Father, help us to put on the armor you have given us to wear in our war against the enemy. Give us the fortitude to stand in your strength. Remind us to pray at all times, when engaged in battle and in between battles."

LIVE IT OUT

Don't lose sight of the fact you are in a spiritual battle—but you're not alone! What will you do this week to trust in Christ and rely on what He has provided?

- ▶ **Pray.** Take everything to God in prayer. Everything. Your victories begin with prayer. Make prayer a regular part of your day, knowing you need to continually look to God for strength.
- ▶ **Stand.** If you find you're susceptible to "the flaming arrows of the evil one"—his lies, doubts, and temptations—use God's armor. Pick up the shield of faith in God's promises and stand firm in Him. Identify several promises from God's Word on which you can stand against spiritual attacks.
- ▶ **Stand together.** Discuss ways to support and encourage each other in the spiritual battles you face.





Relief depicting Roman soldiers, first century A.D.

To describe how a Christian might battle evil forces, Paul spoke in terms of the spiritual armor. Since the concept of full spiritual armor was unique to Paul, what provided the sources for his ideas?

Paul's first source for the armor imagery likely included the Old Testament. Isaiah referred to righteousness as a belt around the waist of the Messiah who would strike the earth in judgment (Isa. 11:1-5). He also referred to the feet of those who bring good news of peace through preaching the gospel message (52:7). Isaiah's description has distinct similarities to the shoes in Paul's spiritual

armor, but Isaiah did not directly connect the shoes to those of a soldier. Isaiah 59:17 mentions a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation the Lord wore as He prepared to judge His people.

Isaiah's references to spiritual armor almost certainly provided the background for Paul's concepts. However, a few differences existed between Isaiah's and Paul's descriptions. In Isaiah, the two definite references speak of God wearing the armor. Paul, however, applied the spiritual armor to the Christian. Though Isaiah mentioned some pieces of armor, Paul brought together an entire suit of armor the Christian should wear. He expanded the Old Testament imagery Isaiah began.

In addition to the Old Testament, Paul used the firsthand knowledge of soldiers to develop the imagery of spiritual armor. Under God's inspiration Paul observed the outfit of the Roman soldier and conveyed a spiritual message.

The excerpt above is from the article "First-Century Armor" (Summer 2005), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Life is often a battle with Satan coming against us, but if we have trusted in Christ for salvation, we are equipped with everything we need to gain the victory.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

GROUPS MATTER.

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog**.

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry