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The Effects of Armor Outfits
United Church of Broomfield
August 22, 2021

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. ¹¹ Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. ¹² We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. ¹³ Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. ¹⁴ So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, ¹⁵ and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. ¹⁶ Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word.

¹⁸ Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers. ¹⁹ As for me, pray that when I open my mouth, I'll get a message that confidently makes this secret plan^[a] of the gospel known. ²⁰ I'm an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel. Pray so that the Lord will give me the confidence to say what I have to say.

If you have ever spent any time in an airport then you know how busy, crazy and complicated they can be. And think about all the things you don't see—for example, the inner details of doing intensive security checks . . . or matching up thousands of pieces of baggage with the right traveler and the right airplane . . . or monitoring weather conditions all over the world. It's pretty incredible that millions of people fly all over the world every year with "relatively" few disruptions. How do airports do it? Well, did you know that before a major airport opens, it has to undergo a stress test?

An airport stress test is like a dress rehearsal for opening night of a Broadway show. Last year, a new airport was built in Berlin, Germany. The Berlin Brandenburg International Airport was completed in October 2020, at a cost of \$7 billion dollars. Before they officially opened their doors to the public, they asked for a few hundred volunteers each week to participate in a stress test to determine if the airport's operations were working as they should be. For example, do the signs in the terminal make sense? Are the security scanners effective? Is the baggage handling operation matching up the right bag with the right flight? Do the toilets work?

Volunteers were asked to go through the whole process of acting as if they were taking a flight. They went up to the ticket counters and got their plane tickets. They went through security checkpoints. They bought overpriced food and magazines from airport kiosks. They checked airport message boards to confirm flight schedules.

Most of it was fairly routine stuff. But the airport authority threw in a few challenges. In order to prepare their employees for any challenges they might face, they secretly arranged a number of small crises. Certain passengers were requested to act like spoiled, high-maintenance VIPs. Flights got canceled at the last minute. Hundreds of bags got re-routed to another airport. A security scanner suffered a glitch. All these surprises were arranged to test the airport employees' resourcefulness and attitude in the face of problems. Would

they rise to the challenge? Or would they react in anger, lashing out at the frustrated passengers crowded around them?¹

How do you think you would do in that situation? Do you get a headache just thinking about it? This article makes you think about how useful a stress test really is. What if you could get a dress rehearsal that would prepare you for the challenges and heartbreaks and battles of life?

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about a passage from Ephesians 4 and how Paul was trying to get people from every segment of ancient Roman society to envision a new kind of community, a community based on equality and sacrificial love, something that had never been seen before. We talked about doing that by IMITATING GOD. Last week, we talked about a passage in Ephesians 5 focusing on how we live our daily lives – we carefully do it by BEING PREPARED. Today, we’re talking about the armor of God; having the tools so that that we can STAY PREPARED. These passages challenge believers, then and now, to envision a new way of relating to one another. Paul challenges Jesus-followers to treat others the way Jesus would—with compassion, kindness, respect, humility. And if this new way of life isn’t challenging enough, remember that followers of Jesus endured hostility from fellow citizens and persecution by the Roman government.

How would they respond? Would the pressures to fit in, to conform to their culture, cause them to lose their cool, as well as lose their faith?

Paul knew the struggles they were facing. When he became a follower of Christ, he lost his position as a Pharisee. He lost his status and security. With that, we can assume he lost the respect of friends and colleagues. For the rest of his life, he endured harassment and persecution and beatings and imprisonment in order to share his faith in Jesus Christ. And in this passage, Paul shares with them, and us, his secret for handling the pressure – for facing down any challenge without losing his faith.

He begins by writing, “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.”

According to Paul, the first step in facing down any challenge is to learn to depend on God. Some of us live as if the only power we have to draw on is our own, and as if we are whipped before the battle has even begun.

Remember that hilarious scene in the Old Testament in which David, the young shepherd, is going out to face the giant Goliath. Saul, the king, places upon David his own armor—his breastplate, his sword, his helmet. One version of the Scripture says, “David tried in vain to go.” Saul’s armor was too heavy! The little fellow couldn’t move! So, David took Saul’s armor off and went out to face Goliath with only his faith in God, God’s armor. “You come at me with sword and shield,” he says to Goliath, “but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Israel. He will give me victory this day.” You know the outcome. The young shepherd boy slew the giant warrior.

¹ “What It’s Like to Stress-Test Berlin’s Brand New, Much Maligned Airport” by Andrew Curry, *Atlas Obscura*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/berlin-airport-dress-rehearsal>.

How great would it be if every one of us could go out and face the world wearing the armor of God! The difference in our lives would be extraordinary. Young people at school, as well as adults in the workplace — battling temptation—overcoming discouragement—standing up to the bullies of this world. I wish every person able to hear my voice could leave here walking in the confidence that there is an unseen strength and power that goes with us.

Dr. Francis Collins is the current Director of the National Institute of Health and the former director of the National Human Genome Research Institute. In that role he was the Senior Investigator of Medical Genomics, one of the most prestigious jobs in the science world. In an interview with PBS, he shared how his faith in God informs his scientific research.

As a young man, Collins was an atheist. Many of his colleagues were atheists or agnostics, so few people challenged his beliefs. But Dr. Collins' atheism was challenged by his patients' faith. As he said, "Some of my patients were clearly relying very heavily on their faith as a source of strength in circumstances that were pretty awful. They had terrible diseases from which they were probably not going to escape, and yet instead of railing at God, they seemed to lean on their faith as a source of great comfort and reassurance."²

Dr. Collins began his journey to faith in Jesus Christ by witnessing the strength and comfort that God offers to those who are clothed in His love. To those who are clothed in His truth. To those who are clothed in His power. This is the armor of God that Paul is referencing. It allows believers to face down the worst circumstances with strength and peace. Step one—learn to depend on God.

The second step for facing any challenge is to ask God to give you courage and confidence. Verses 14-17 in our passage reads like this, "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."

Effectiveness in life so often is determined by the twin qualities of courage and confidence. But where do courage and confidence come from? From basing your life on the truth of God and the character of God. When you trust in God to lead you in wisdom, truth and power each day, obstacles become opportunities to grow in faith. Enemies become opportunities to grow in character. Challenges become opportunities to grow in wisdom.

Does faith in God mean you'll never experience fear? No! But it does mean that you will act with wisdom, character and courage in spite of your fear.

Finally, the secret to dealing with any challenge is to stay prepared daily by opening yourself daily to the power and the presence of God. That's what the armor of God is. Verses 18-20 read, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying

² "An Interview with Dr. Francis Collins" PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/collins.html>.

for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains."

According to author Jay Strack, "(The word) Prepare is from the Latin *parare* meaning 'to make complete, to point in the right direction, and to equip for battle.'"³

That's exactly what the armor of God and prayer do for the believer: they make us complete, they point us in the right direction, and they equip us for battle. But we have to stay prepared ourselves every day by prayer, by reading our Bible, by spending time in aligning our minds and priorities and habits and attitudes with the mind of Jesus Christ. You will face suffering and challenges and spiritual battles in your life. It happens to everyone. God isn't going to protect you from every battle. God is going to equip you for every battle. But you have to do your part.

Jocko Willink is a former Navy SEAL and best-selling author. His training with the Seals taught him, among other things, mental toughness, the ability to control his thoughts so that he didn't get distracted from his mission. One of his mental practices is to respond to any challenge or obstacle with one word: "Good." For example, their Jeep broke down on a rescue mission. Good. He suffered an injury during a covert operation. Good. You didn't get the job you wanted? Good.

This one-word response forces Willink to look at the situation from a new perspective, to see it as an opportunity instead of a threat. It forces him to see the positives in a negative situation. Willink uses this one-word response to prepare himself ahead of time for any battle he might face.⁴

That's the kind of spiritual preparation Paul wants fellow believers to have—to see any adversity as an opportunity for doing good. Let me give you an example of that.

In the early part of the 20th century, Japan officially annexed Korea. Japanese officials announced that on the first day of every month, all Korean citizens would be required to bow down in worship to the shrine of the Japanese sun goddess. Anyone who didn't bow down to the goddess could be beaten or arrested.

Later, in the 1930s, a young Korean schoolteacher named Ahn Ei Sook was pressured by her school administrator to take part in this forced worship of the Japanese sun goddess. However, Ahn Ei Sook was a Christian. Her faith in Jesus made it impossible for her to participate in this act. However, if she didn't participate in this act of pagan worship, she and her colleagues and students could become targets of persecution by the Japanese government.

The first day of the month came around, and everyone in Ahn's school marched toward the Japanese sun god shrine. Ahn could hear students around her whispering, questioning if their Christian teacher would betray her faith in exchange for her safety. When the order came to bow down, Ahn Ei Sook stood tall. Inside, she was terrified. At that moment, she thought to herself, "I am dead."

Fortunately, she survived this challenge to her faith. However, Ahn Ei Sook and thirty-four other believers were arrested and thrown into prison. They were beaten and left in miserable conditions. For six years, Ahn survived in this brutal environment meanwhile sharing her faith with the other prisoners. When they were released in 1945, a prison guard who was impressed by their courage shouted as they passed through the exit, "These are the ones who for six long years refused to worship Japanese gods. They fought against severe

³ Jay Strack, *Above and Beyond* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), p. 4.

⁴ "The one-word response to adversity" by Ramit Sethi, "I Will Teach You to be Rich newsletter," November 21, 2020.

torture, hunger, and cold, and have won out without bowing their heads to the idol worship of Japan. Today they are the champions of the faith!”⁵

Where did this young Korean school teacher get the strength, courage and confidence to withstand arrest and torture for her faith? She prepared herself by daily putting on the armor of God.

Whatever battle you are fighting—against depression or anger or unbelief—the battle has already been won in the heavenly realms. Let’s not get so caught up in this “battle metaphor” that we forget this is a spiritual battle – one that is already won. In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul wrote, “^{God} put everything under Christ’s feet and made him head of everything in the church, which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.”

God stands ready to fight for us today. All we need to do is imitate God, be prepared and STAY prepared - wearing the armor of God and standing firm while God works through us. There is nothing we cannot overcome if we rely on the strength, courage and confidence that come from our relationship with God.

AMEN

⁵ From *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship*. Based on Ahn Ei Sook’s personal account of her resistance to the Japanese regime: *If I Perish* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/witness/ahn-ei-sook>.