GEAR UP!

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

GEAR UP!

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR 10-13, HIGH SCHOOL & ADULT
Written by SISTER MEGAN CARTER

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Chairman:
Brother Rick Williams

Chairman Elect:
Brother Rick Williams

Contributing Editors:
Elder Mitch Glasscock
Elder Jerry Miller
Elder David Swindle
Elder Todd Fugate

Proofreaders:
Sister Marlee Boenig
Sister Mary Beth Cline
Brother Jason Lambert
Sister Laura Waugh
Brother Jeremy McWhorter
Sister Deborah Williams

Booklet Design and Layout:
Brother Cory Glass

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Treasurer
Brother Randall Henson
10022 Woodburn-Allen Springs Rd.
Alvaton, KY 42122
270-842-4526

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LESSON ONE

BODY ARMOR

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:11, 12, & 14

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

A note to the teacher...

Dear teacher,

If you've used this literature before, you'll notice right off the bat that it's different than before. The committee has spent hours planning and brainstorming to create a new and better product. Our primary goals have been to produce something that would be immediately more attractive to your young people and more accessible when they open their books. A very close secondary goal is to create teacher's guides that make your teaching experience easier and more enjoyable. That means that you'll find the meat of the lessons here in this book. The student page for each lesson can serve as an outline that you can teach from or, if you prefer, you can start with the character I've integrated into each lesson.

A personal goal of mine has been to try to write a true Bible study guide for you. Vacation Bible School is primarily for our children, but it's also a fantastic opportunity for those of us who teach the children to learn and grow through our preparations to teach. That's why there's far more information in the pages of this book than you'll find in the pages of your students' books. Not everything in this book will come up in your classes, but I hope you will have a better general overview of what you're teaching because of it.

I hope that your study here inspires you to dig deeper and deeper into God's word. Pray as your read and let the Lord teach you before you go to teach others. Meditate on it, discuss it with others, ask questions, and get answers! God wants you to know Him better and there's no limit to finding out more. I am praying for you!

Megan Carter
carterfamilybg@gmail.com
270-779-4323

Ephesians 6:10-17

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.
11 Put on the **whole armour** of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
13 Wherefore take unto you the **whole armour** of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
(emphasis added)

BACKGROUND

Our key scripture is just 8 verses out of 6 whole chapters that belong to what we now refer to as a book of the Bible, so it's important to have some grasp of the context into which those verses fit. Here are some brief biographical facts to get you started:

WHAT?

The "book" of Ephesians was originally written as a letter or *epistle* to the disciples of Christ who made up the church which had been established in Ephesus. The original language of this writing was Greek.

WHO?

This letter was written by the apostle Paul, who, after his conversion, travelled around Eurasia preaching the gospel and assisting saved people as they organized churches.

WHEN?

Paul is thought to have written this and several of his other letters around 60-65 AD, which would have been approximately 30 years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

WHERE?

At the time of this writing, Paul was imprisoned in Rome. He also wrote his letters to the Philippians and Colossians as well as his letters specifically addressed to Philemon (and others of that nearby assembly), Titus, and the first letter to Timothy during the same time period (either during his imprisonment or shortly after being released). With the exception of Timothy, these letters would have been his last known communication with each of these groups/individuals. The second letter to Timothy was written shortly before Paul's death and that contains what we consider to be the apostle's final words.

HOW?

Since he was imprisoned, he had to send some of his letters by other people. The letter to the Ephesians was delivered by a man named Tychicus, whom Paul refers to as "a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord" (Eph. 6:21).

WHY?

The tone of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is encouraging and the central theme is unity of believers.

Each of Paul's letters seemed to have a specific purpose, most addressing problems or issues that had arisen. The letter to the Ephesians, however, doesn't seem to address a problem or contain advice to "fix" something. It seems to be more of a simple restating of the message Paul had taught and preached to them during his time there. Out of all of Paul's missionary stops, he seems to have spent the longest in Ephesus (going twice and staying for around 2 years the second time). Paul undoubtedly had a close relationship and a great love for the disciples at Ephesus and wanted to leave them with final assurances of God's providence, Christ's redeeming power, and his own personal love for them as well as encouragement to stick together.

Now, before you go any further, please read the entire 6 chapters of Ephesians.

WHY ARMOR?

Paul likely got the idea of encouraging us as children of God to wear spiritual armor based on the armor that God wears, according to Isaiah 59:17. More about that in lesson 5. Furthermore, at the time this letter was written, Rome was the greatest political and military power in the world. Rome boasted a large and powerful army that was quickly invading and conquering territories throughout Eurasia. Much of Paul's writing occurred just prior to the final destruction of Jerusalem at which point the Roman army destroyed the second temple and killed or enslaved many Jews and Christians. Rome's power was great in Ephesus as well. No doubt, the Ephesian people were accustomed to seeing soldiers, so it was a powerful, scriptural symbol in the first place and it makes further sense that Paul chose to refer to something with which they were familiar.

EPHESUS

Many times I've mistakenly imagined the early church to be much more like the present-day church than it actually was. Knowing little about Ephesus and other places Paul visited, I assumed they must have been decent places to live since there were churches there. This is a limited viewpoint and to fully appreciate the impact this letter must have had upon God's people in Ephesus, I think we need somewhat of a grasp on what it was really like there.

We tend to hear a lot about the depravity of Rome and the false religion of Greece, but not so much about the other places. Ephesus was basically no different than Rome and Greece. Men and women followed their lusts, both natural and perverse, and sexual immorality was rampant. There was an arena where gladiators were forced to fight to the death, criminals were crucified, and Jews and Christians were fed to lions. Imagine how sports fanatics conduct themselves at a football or basketball game and you'll get a picture of how Ephesian citizens conducted themselves as they watched these "games," eating and drinking, cheering and applauding as blood was spilled for their entertainment.

There was a large, beautiful library and temporal knowledge was highly esteemed as well as knowledge of the things they called spiritual.

There was also a temple which is said to have been an awe-inspiring structure and housed a large statue of the goddess Artemis (as she was called by the Greeks; the Romans called her Diana). She was imagined to be the goddess of fertility and "worshipping" her fell into line with the depraved way of life at the time.

The church was certainly present, but it was small in comparison to the rest of the population (Acts 19:7 says there were about 12 who Paul baptized initially!). Even as that number grew, they undoubtedly kept their beliefs quiet and met with other Christians secretly, knowing they would be sent to the arena if they were discovered by the wrong people. Yet Paul preached publicly in this place for three months!

BEGINNING AT THE ENDING

Now that we have an understanding of what life was like for the Christians in Ephesus, we can better understand what it was like for them to receive this letter from Paul. It had been somewhere between 5 and 10 years since Paul had been in Ephesus, the Ephesians had likely heard that Paul had been imprisoned, and were likely concerned for his wellbeing. We can know without doubt that since Paul's letter is now a part of our scriptures, it was inspired by God and thereby must have been exactly what the Ephesian Christians needed to hear (as well as exactly what ***we*** need to hear). Perhaps they were discouraged, doubting the Lord's cause, and fearful for the future of the church.

And then Paul's letter arrived telling them that they were chosen before the foundation of the world, that they are sealed with the holy Spirit of promise and are God's workmanship, and that God is able to do so much more than they're even able to think of or ask Him to do. What a balm to their souls those words must have been! What a balm to ***our*** souls! That we, like the Ephesians, being physical Gentiles "should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"! And what a beautiful promise!

The remainder of Paul's letter deals heavily with unity among believers and practical instructions for a godly life.

Our key scripture begins with the word ***Finally***.

That word signals readers to pay attention. It's like saying, "Ok, guys, I've said all this other important stuff and now I'm going to wrap it all up." If one of the central themes of the letter to the Ephesians is unity, it's fitting that Paul would finish up by encouraging those Christians to all "put on" the same armor. When men are called to duty in a physical army, they aren't told to go find whatever gear they can round up and bring it with them; they're all equipped (at least preliminarily) exactly the same. This in itself has a unifying effect. Everyone knows they're fitly prepared for the battle ahead of them. The same is true of our invisible armor. Every saved person has access to each "piece" of equipment listed in our text. Thus, we are not only enabled to stand against wickedness on our own (with God's help, of course), but also to stand together in an army with other saved people being perfectly and equally equipped for the battle we all must face.

Now we're ready to consider the armor itself.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Ephesians 6:10-13
[10]Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

As we already discussed on our background page, that word *finally* signals the wrap-up portion of Paul's letter. Generally speaking, the most important information in an informative letter would likely be placed at the beginning or the end. In the case of Paul's letters, we know, of course, that all the information is equally important, so this final section serves as sort of a summary. If this last paragraph is the summary of the whole letter, then verse 10 is that paragraph's thesis statement. *Finally* would have signaled the reader's attention and the rest of the verse would let them know briefly what they were about to read. Paul's letter to the Ephesians contained a lot of wisdom and instructions on being unified and living a godly life; the summary wraps all of that good stuff up in a nice, tight little package that's easily memorable. Paul is remembered for his zeal and for his boldness, but he was also an excellent writer.

[11]Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Verse 11 is expands on the statement of verse 10. Remember that when Paul wrote this, he didn't write it in verses; the chapter/verse divisions of our Bible came much later. We wouldn't number our sentences if we were writing a letter and neither did Paul. Verse 10 tells us to be strong and verse 11 tells us how to do that.

Verse 11 has another important job: it tells us who our enemy is. Soldiers are not sent into battle ignorant of their enemy. Indeed, they are debriefed on every possible detail about them, including how to recognize them and how to take advantage of their weaknesses.

Our enemy is the devil, of course, or more specifically the *wiles* of the devil. The Amplified Version of the Bible uses the words *strategies* and *deceits* in place of *wiles*. I think those words are pretty accurate in describing what Satan does. They also give us a little preview of what this armor is going to help us do. Satan is indeed very strategic; he watches and waits to see what our weaknesses are and then he attacks them, nearly always employing some level of deceit to turn our eyes away from Jesus.

Verses 10 and 11 leave us with the specific instruction to *stand* as well as giving us a fairly specific idea of what we're up against.

[12]For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

This next verse continues to expand upon the previous expansion, building a nice little pyramid of thoughts. Verse 11 refers to the *wiles* of the devil, which is a little vague, given no further explanation in that verse itself. Verse 12 goes on to explain that our fight is not against physical things. Our enemy isn't flesh and blood, but principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places.

So, Paul has given us the very physical, concrete image of armor, but now he's telling us that our fight isn't physical or concrete at all. *Wiles* was vague enough; the explanation of *wiles* somehow became more vague, not to mention kind of terrifying. What does it mean?

Principalities refers, most basically, to a state ruled by a prince, but the Amplified Version Bible replaces this word with *despotisms*, which refers to a state under absolute power or absolute rule (what we might call a dictatorship). *Powers* refers to outside forces that might act upon a person. *Rulers of darkness* and *spiritual wickedness in high places* both refer again to these invisible workings of Satan, which are ever present but always seem to be just outside of our physical or mental grasp. Consider the manner in which Satan works his crafty dealings: through suggestion, persuasion, comparison, doubt, and questioning. He works, many times, in the peripheral with his whisperings, striking when we look the other way or sliding in beside us when we're most vulnerable. He plays dirty and he deals in stuff that's outside of our natural grasp. And when he finds a foothold, he hangs on relentlessly taking as much control as he's given.

That's why it's necessary that we have something beyond ourselves to defend against him.

[13]Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Verse 11 said to put on the **whole** armor of God that you may be able to stand and now verse 13 is repeating it. Verse 12 lays out the description of our enemy and it has these whole armor bookends. Even in the writing itself Paul has trapped the enemy by surrounding it with this as-of-yet unknown armor. Already we get a sense of the strength of this armor.

Break this verse down and you get the basic instructions: Put on every piece of God's armor and you will have everything you need. Then… STAND!

Lesson 1 – Body Armor (belt and breastplate)

Ephesians 6:14
[14]Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

We've finally gotten to the actual armor. Paul's last statement ended with the word *stand* and now this statement is beginning with the word *stand*. That must be a pretty important part of being an armor wearer. A soldier might be fully armed and fully equipped, but if he never leaves the bunker, none of that stuff is going to do anybody much good. It's very clear that God expects us take an active part in resisting Satan's advances. He may be the One who adds to us all the things we need to accomplish anything, but He wants our willingness. *Stand, stand, stand!*

[14]Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

…having your loins girt about with truth is the first part of the armor we have to inspect. Even though this piece of armor isn't specifically named in the scripture, it is vital to the soldier's safety as well as to the effectiveness of the rest of the armor. Let's look at it from a physical standpoint first.

Many times, you will hear this piece of armor referred to as the "belt of truth," which is a pretty good way to think of it. The belt of a Roman soldier was, however, a whole lot sturdier than the thin strip of leather (or something pretending to be leather) that we wear today. The belt of a Roman soldier was thick, heavy leather and was likely

decorated with metal pieces, both for appearance sake and to make it more impenetrable. It wrapped around his waist, covering a wide swath of his abdomen and thereby offering some protection to his soft, vulnerable belly. Many long leather strips hung down from the belt itself, protecting a portion of the lower body as well.

Furthermore, the belt offered the soldier support. Our back and core muscles have a big job, not only supporting our spine and internal organs, but also bearing the brunt of the load when we carry heavy things. A wide belt would have given some external support to the soldier when all of his internal support grew fatigued from marching and fighting, all while wearing and carrying heavy gear.

So, we see that this belt was part of the soldier's defensive gear *and* provided him some support, but perhaps the belt's most important job was holding a scabbard: home for the soldier's sword. Because what good is a soldier without a weapon? More about that later.

Now, let's look at the belt from a spiritual perspective. Why is truth first? The first thing that comes to mind here is the Sunday School song about the wise man and the foolish man (and the collaborating parable, of course): *The wise man built his house upon the rock and the house on the rock stood firm.* That parable is about choosing a good foundation. The rock of our foundation is Jesus; He is literally called the chief cornerstone just a few chapters before our text (Ephesians 2:20). What's another one of Jesus's many names? *The Truth!* He called Himself that (John 14:6). One of Satan's favorite devices is doubt. He love to whisper in our ears, "Are you sure?" Our best defense to cling to is what we *know* to be true. So, if we're going to put on any kind of spiritual armor, it had better begin with a solid foundation and what better foundation than this Rock of Truth?

The next question is *why a belt?* Actually, a better question might be *what are we trying to guard with this belt?* I think it's safe to say that Roman soldiers were pretty concerned with keeping their hearts protected. The weaponry of the time, for the most part, aimed for killing through blood loss (swords/knives, spears, arrows, etc.). If most people on the battlefield have swords or knives, then you're going to protect yourself against the damage those weapons could do. In the chaos of battle when there's a lot of sword-swinging and slashing going on, it's the belly that would be most vulnerable and if your enemies are looking to get at your heart, the way that would require the least precision is up under the ribs via that soft area of the belly.

Likewise, Christians are given these instructions in Proverbs 4:23: *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* The heart mentioned in this verse doesn't refer to the blood-pumping organ that resides in your chest; it refers to our inner person – who we *really are* and the part of us that *feels* on a figurative level. Many verses in the Psalms refer to the "desires of my heart" and praising God "with all my heart" and asking God to "examine my heart and my mind." All of these references help us to understand what's actually meant by this "kind" of heart, even though it's difficult to articulate.

So, here again, if we're supposed to

guard this non-physical heart of ours, it makes sense that we should give special attention to the areas in which we're most vulnerable. And what better to guard our vulnerabilities with than truth? Not only that, but we should wrap it around us and fasten it tight so it's sure to stay put. This answers the question of *why a belt?* Consider something you absolutely *know* to be true. For this example, let's use the most basic truth of our faith: God exists. I'd say for saved people (especially those who try to maintain close walk with the Lord), this is a truth that would be difficult for us to doubt. Through the course of this study, we'll examine several other pieces that go with this spiritual armor. If all of those were somehow stripped away, we would still have our foundation! We might come to doubt everything else, even God's goodness, but that foundation of truth is strapped to us and will continue to support us even when our burdens are heavy and we feel that we can rely on nothing else. Consider Job, who literally lost it all but still clung to these words: "I know my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." That was his belt of truth.

[14]Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

As a part of physical armor, the breastplate worked together with the belt to protect the heart and other vital organs found in the chest and upper abdomen. Although the chest is less vulnerable being caged in with ribs, it houses the most life-sustaining parts of the body and was therefore heavily guarded. The formed metal of the breastplate afforded the soldier a layer of protection against heavy swords and possible ballistic attacks and likely covered much the same area of the front of a sleeveless shirt, only shorter – stopping around the area of the lowest ribs. The breastplate and the belt met in the middle, which gave the soldier a greater range of motion than solid metal from neck to hip would have allowed.

As a part of our spiritual armor, the breastplate is just as essential as the soldier's physical breastplate. We already discussed the importance of "keeping our heart" in the belt section, so now let's look more closely at this righteousness that forms our breastplate. When I think of righteousness, my thoughts go immediately to the holiness of God. Only God is truly righteous and our only hope is to "put on" His righteousness through the blood of Jesus in salvation. The *righteousness* that's supposed to be our breastplate is somewhat different. I love to use Webster's 1828 Dictionary (available online at www.websterdictionary1828.com) and part of his definition for *righteousness* is "conformity of heart and life to the divine law." We might simply call it *integrity*.

Now, we know, obviously, that God helps us to do right and it's certainly a wise idea to seek His guidance in trying to make good choices and live a life that's in keeping with His Word, but there are non-religious, possibly unsaved people out there who are decent, honest, law-abiding, moral folks. Thus we can see that being a person of integrity is *our choice*. God gave every human free will and lets us decide the path we'll take. Because it is our choice, guarding our hearts with integrity is so very important. The physical counterpart of this piece of armor was made out of metal, a substance that is, by its

nature, unyielding. So should our will be when it comes to deciding between right and wrong. When we make up our minds to do right and look to the Lord for help in doing that, *then* He lends His strength to the equation, making our breastplate that much more impenetrable.

Why should a saved person "keep their hearts" and guard it with integrity? We're instructed in I Thessalonians (5:22) to "abstain from all appearance of evil." Furthermore, our good character can be an example to others and even perhaps give us the opportunity to tell someone why we're different when they notice we don't always go along with the crowd. That must mean that we can do whatever we want behind closed doors as long as we're careful when others are watching, right? Consider this verse from Luke (8:17): "*For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad*." I've heard this described in the computer terminology *GIGO*, or "garbage in, garbage out." In other words, even if you wait to take part in sinful behavior in the privacy of your own home, you can still expect the unsavory stuff you're taking in to come out somehow. What we take in changes us. And even if it never hurt or affected another single person, it hurts us and our relationship with God. When Satan tempts you, it's *you* he's after. And if he can take down a few more people at the same time, all the better from his perspective. Don't be fooled into believing that keeping things to yourself won't hurt anybody. True integrity helps to guard you against harming even yourself.

Earlier, I mentioned that the physical breastplate and belt worked together. The same is true for our spiritual armor. A life of integrity is based upon the truths of God's Word and the truth He speaks to His children. An unsaved person may be able to live a somewhat "good" life, but a child of God can go straight to the Source of all goodness in difficult situations where the right choice isn't immediately obvious and can rely on His providence in situations where none of the options, right or wrong, are pleasant. Consider Joseph who was propositioned by the wife of his master and had no option that would turn out well for him, yet part of his response to her was, *"...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" He relied on what he knew to be right and, although he was thrown in jail for it, his good character remained intact. His knowledge of the truth (that being with the wife of another man is sinful) coupled with the desire to do right produced a strong breastplate to guard his heart. God is able to see the beginning and ending and all sides of every situation and He is able to reveal His truths to us regarding anything we're faced with. And the kind of integrity based upon those precious, revealed truths is the best and strongest breastplate a person can ever hope to have.

LESSON TWO

BATTLE BOOTS

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:15

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

Before we get into the spiritual symbolism of these shoes, let's take a look at the actual footwear soldiers used in Paul's time. The Roman military was quite sophisticated and no doubt adapted their equipment to match the anticipated attack. One such attack was created by burying sharp objects in the ground, as well as some sort of weapon that commentators refer to as "gall-traps" (*gall* = acid). Plus, battlefields probably weren't the most smooth, pristine landscapes. A good, solid pair of shoes would have been the soldier's first line of defense against such things. If you Google "Roman soldier shoes," you get varied results, but my opinion is that their shoes were fairly well-enclosed, made with a foundation of heavy leather, and covered, perhaps, with metal studs. It's likely the shoes themselves or a separate piece of gear extended to protect the shins, as well. This left only a small section of the soldier's legs uncovered since the belt straps covered him to mid-thigh. Thus, he was well-covered, but still able to move freely.

Why would the enemy bother with trying to attack a soldier's feet? Feet are sensitive and vulnerable. A soldier with injured feet is useless and doesn't pose a threat to actual man power. There's no waste of energy or ammunition. He's finished before he even reaches the real battle.
So… shoes seem kind of like a "given," don't they? Of course a soldier is going to have shoes on. Especially if he anticipates a specific attack on his feet. So why are shoes specifically mentioned? We might not consider a soldier's shoes his most important piece of gear, but he certainly wouldn't be very effective without them. A shoeless soldier might still try to go into battle, but consider how much more difficult everything would become if he was thinking about his feet with every single step. Every pebble would become a distraction. A soldier with a dependable pair of shoes can stay focused on the real task at hand without having to be quite so preoccupied with where he sets his foot down.

Ephesians 6:15
[15]And your feet shod with the preparation of <u>the gospel of peace</u>;

Now, onto our spiritual "shoes." Whereas the Roman soldier's shoes were constructed first and foremost from leather, our shoes are primarily "made of" the gospel – *good news*. We equate "the gospel" with God's Word, specifically that Jesus is the Savior, that He was born, laid down His life, and rose again to defeat death. Most of all, the gospel tells us that (because of all the things just mentioned) we can have a relationship with the Savior and eternal life because of it. That really is good news, isn't it?

We don't often hear it referred to as "the gospel of peace," however, so why would Paul refer to it that way here, of all places, when he's preparing us

for battle? Why would we enter battle equipped with anything to do with peace?

It certainly is a gospel of peace, though, bringing us first and foremost peace with God. It also assists in our laying aside differences with our brethren, thereby creating peace with others, as well as bringing about a sense of peace with ourselves, giving us the ability to lay down the temporal things that trouble us or the things that bring us shame and regret.

The peace a saved person has access to makes for a happier life, but it's also the ultimate defense against all kinds of things that distract us from serving God. Many accounts of soldiers entering battle tell of how they weren't afraid anymore because they had fully accepted that they would die that day and were willing to die for the cause of the battle. You could say that they had a kind of peace about what they were going to do. Those soldiers who find a way to overcome fear are much more effective on the battlefield than if they were crippled by fear. Likewise, a company of men can fight much more effectively as a unified group than a group of men who were fighting amongst themselves just before the battle.

I didn't include this on the student's page, but a good biblical example of this is Paul when he was about to sail for Jerusalem. It was dangerous for him to go and preach there and his friends begged him not to go. This was his response in Acts 21:13: "*Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*" Paul was qualified to write about this armor because he *wore* it! He was settled in the peace of the gospel he felt so compelled to preach, even at the risk of losing his life.

We as saved people have access to that same peace and can approach our spiritual battles with the same confidence as Paul because, like him, we have the ultimate source of peace in our very souls! Furthermore, we know our enemy is already defeated. The war is won, but we still must fight our individual battles. With God's help we can face those difficult times with peace. Our lives may get rocked, but our souls can stay steady. Our churches benefit from the peace we each feel individually, as well, as it helps to guard against petty contentions between us and our fellow church members and other brothers and sisters in Christ.

[15]And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

This word *preparation* is just as important as what our shoes are "made of." The initial preparation, of course, is being saved. After that, the saved person has constant access to real peace no matter their age, situation in life, or how long they've been saved. Peace isn't something that requires experience. However, the more experience a saved person has, the greater access he has to that peace. Or maybe it would be more appropriate to say that he becomes more and more aware of that peace. Have you ever heard a saved person say, "The longer I'm saved, the more I love Jesus," or "The older I get, the sweeter my salvation becomes"? That doesn't mean a person has to wait until they're old. If you want to love God more, all you have to do is spend more time with Him. The more time you spend with Him, the sweeter He is to you; the more you love Him, the more you trust Him, the more He'll confirm Himself and His truth to you. And the peace you feel grows greater and greater. The peace doesn't change… *you do.*

I think another way to say "the preparation of the gospel of peace" is "being grounded in the gospel of peace." That means you are firmly planted in it and won't be easily moved from it.

[15]And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

This is a good place to start considering why Paul chose our feet to equip with this preparation of the gospel of peace.

We already talked about the belt, which served as a kind of foundational piece of equipment. Shoes serve as a foundation as well, literally and figuratively.

Consider Eve and the foundation she'd been given – perfect peace in the garden and the knowledge that God loved her and was perfectly meeting all her needs. So what did Satan suggest? *That it wasn't enough*. His whisper that she could have more and even that God *knew* she could have more and was purposely keeping it from her introduced discontentment to her heart and shattered her peace. How easily she slipped into disobedience when her underpinnings were knocked out from under her. We are no different than Eve. But we have her example to remind us to guard against such things.

Of course Satan will try to knock out our foundations! That's why he loves things like doubt and discontentment; those things disturb our peace. It's an easy attack for him. But we are clearly told in James 4:7 that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. The best way to resist those kinds of attacks is to be totally grounded in the peace we have with God. Then when Satan comes with his suggestions, we can confidently say in faith, "No, that isn't right! Leave me alone!" Similar to our Lord's response to His temptation in Matthew 4:10. Satan recoils at that kind of response.

Just as a soldier with a good pair of shoes doesn't have to give much thought to where he puts his foot down, neither do we as saved people have to give thought to where we stand with God as we fight against our enemy. If you've been saved, then you are prepared to stand against sin. You have access to the necessary tools to fight Satan. That doesn't mean it will be easy. Don't ever think that! But the more time you spend with God (praying, praising Him, reading His word, etc.), the more grounded you become in that peace you've been given.

How appropriate that Paul chose shoes for this illustration because when we have our feet firmly planted in peace, we're much more able to meet that primary objective: ***STAND!***

LESSON THREE

SOLDIER SAFETY

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:16

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

Ephesians 6:16
Above all, <u>taking the shield</u> of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

We're entering more familiar territory now, beginning with this piece of armor. My brain calls up a pretty immediate picture when I hear the word *shield*. The kind of shield a Roman soldier carried into battle, however, is quite different than what most of us might picture.

For one thing, it was enormous. A soldier could hold it up near his head and it extended to mid-leg. That means that if he set it on the ground, he could easily crouch behind it and protect his entire body. It was like his own personal wall.

The shield's shape was also important (and differs from what we'd expect). It was a rounded rectangle and was curved so that it hugged around the man carrying it. A curved surface could deflect much more effectively than a flat surface with no added effort from the soldier. You'll notice if you look up pictures of shields from this era that nearly every example has a knob in the middle of it. The shield is primarily considered a defensive tool, but that knob – called the "boss" – allowed the soldier to use his shield for offensive purposes as well. Even such a simple, benign-looking little bump could inflict serious damage on an opposing soldier if it were rammed into his rib cage, for example.

One way that this piece of armor differs from the ones we've discussed previously is that it was not worn; it had to be carried. The shield likely had some sort of strap for long-distance carrying, but it was primarily held with one hand by a handle in the middle. Grasped in one hand, the shield was easily moveable.

Or was it easily moveable? As easily moveable as an approximately 4-foot by 2-foot piece of thick metal can be. It had to be made of heavy, thick metal or else it would have gotten in the way more than serving any great purpose. The shield was essential in battle as a piece of personal protection. Groups of soldiers also used them in formations, surrounding themselves on all sides with these shields and effectively creating the equivalent of a man-powered tank (look up "tortoise formation" if you're interested). A soldier *had* to have his shield, but his shield was hard to carry. He likely got really tired of it on the long marches, but he was surely thankful for it when the battles raged around him.

Above all, taking the shield <u>of faith</u>, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Now, let's compare our spiritual shield to that of the Roman soldier. Our shield is "made of" faith. And what is *faith*? Fortunately, we have an actual biblical definition in Hebrews: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* What does that mean? The Amplified Bible translation clarifies it in this way: "…faith is the <u>title deed</u> of things hoped for…" When I bought my first car, I went with my dad to do all of the ownership transfer paperwork and when we left the courthouse, I had a title in my hand. The car was still sitting at the previous owner's house, but the document I held proved that it belonged to me. The clarification given for that first part of that verse is *so* very appropriate because, through the faith given by God, we can *hold in our hands* the truth of things we can only hope for at this point. Hope is an earnest expectation, not anxious excitement. Many times, we misuse the word like kids at Christmas: "I hope I get a time machine! I hope I get a pet rhinoceros! I hope I get 157 presents!" Hope is looking forward to something we believe will actually happen and is therefore intimately linked to faith. We can know, because of faith, that the things we hope for in the Lord, based on His promises, are as good as done.

The rest of that verse, *"…the evidence of things not seen,"* is clarified in this way in the Amplified version: "…faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses." The first part of this verse points toward the future, but this part covers all of those things – past, present, and future – which we can't or haven't yet experienced with our senses. Faith is what brings the Bible to life. It makes real the fact that God lovingly molded a man out of the dirt and that Jesus smeared some of that same dirt across the eyes of a blind man and caused him to see. It gives us assurance that the Holy Spirit is working on the other end when we have a burden to pray for someone. And it stirs awe and curiosity in our hearts and minds when we consider the trumpet that will sound as Jesus appears to rescue His children.

We can believe those things all day long, but faith makes us *know*.

Faith – this *knowing* – can very appropriately be compared to a shield for many reasons. Like the Roman soldier's shield, faith is *enormous*. It covers everything else, but at the same time works together *with* everything else. Faith is our first line of defense and it is "made" to deflect whatever difficulties come our way. Faith is primarily an inward defense, but in times of crisis can become a decisive tool to attack Satan and those working for him (whether knowingly or unknowingly). Our knowledge of what we believe and our sureness of those things defends against Satan *and* drives him away at the same time.

Finally, perhaps the way in which faith is most like a shield is how it's "worn." Or not worn, as it were. Based on Paul's descriptions of the previous attributes, we could say that our foundation of truth, our integrity, and the peace of God is *strapped* to us. That doesn't mean we can't lose those things, too, but those things become

woven into our character with God's help. Faith is something we have to make an effort to hang onto. One of Satan's favorite and most effective tools is doubt, which pulls on our faith causing it to grow heavy over the long march of life. It's in those times of doubt that we can altogether lose our faith, just as a weakened soldier can drop his shield. At those times, we become extremely vulnerable because, although we may still have several good, godly attributes clinging to us, they become severely weakened without the covering of faith.

It's only through God's assistance that our "grip" on faith becomes stronger. ***Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.***

Faith's ability to strengthen all of the other godly attributes is the reason why Paul denotes this piece of armor as the most important. *"Above all…"* Whatever you do, make sure you have your shield! Make sure to be covered by faith. It's hard to hang onto, but you sure will be glad of it in the hard times. ***Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.***

The soldier's shield was a good defense and well-made for its purpose, but it wasn't perfect. He wasn't guaranteed that just because he had his shield, he wouldn't be killed in battle. That's one way that our "shield" differs. This verse promises us that if we take up the shield of faith, we *WILL* be able to defend ourselves against Satan's attacks. Not *might*, not *maybe*… ***"ye shall."*** And not just a few of them either. We will be able to defend ourselves against *ALL* of them.

Ephesians 6:17a
And take the helmet of salvation…
The helmet is the last piece of defensive gear in the lineup. A helmet is a helmet, so there's no need to spend much time describing the one that set on a Roman soldier's head. It was metal, it was heavy, and it was probably decorated to denote that he belonged to the Roman military. And that pretty much sums it up.

The helmet of a child of God is a bit more complex. Salvation seems kind of like a given for a soldier of the Lord, doesn't it? We couldn't be grounded in the truth without being saved, right? Our integrity would have no basis; we'd have no access to real peace, and depending on faith would be impossible if not for salvation. So why does Paul mention it right at the very end? And furthermore, we don't normally connect salvation with our head; we usually connect salvation with our heart or soul.

To get an idea of why Paul chose to address salvation in this way, let's look all the way back to the first chapter of Ephesians. Reread 1:2-14. These verses include Paul's salutation to the Ephesian people and a basic break down of what salvation is and the individual roles God and Jesus have in that salvation. Verse 13 refers specifically to the Ephesians being partakers in salvation. It says that after they heard the truth, they came to believe that Jesus died for them, trusted in Him, and were "…***sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession…"***

The important words here are *promise* and *earnest*. We know what a promise is; let's talk about *earnest*. If you've ever bought a house, you've probably heard of "earnest money." After you decide you're definitely going to buy a house, before you do anything else, you pay some amount of earnest money. It's considered the token of your promise to pay in full. It's your way of saying, "I'm serious about this thing."

Now, let's look at this word *salvation*. From what exactly are we being saved? Punishment for our sins and eternal death as the payment for them, right? Now, this may not be true of every person who's ever been saved, but on the night I was saved, my death was not imminent as far as I could tell. Since our brains can only work within the realm of time, it looks like this: we experience salvation at some point in our lives and are then actually saved (or rescued) from future punishment. That's why Paul refers to it in that way. Knowing we're saved – *experiencing salvation* – is the token of God's promise that He will rescue us from death.

God is so good, though, that He promised not only to rescue us from punishment (which would have been enough and certainly more than we deserve), but also to make us *His own heirs*. We can read in the beautiful 8th chapter of Romans that we are "…*heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ…*" So, as Ephesians 1:13-14 actually says, salvation is the "earnest of our inheritance." Salvation is wonderful. It *feels* good to us from a human perspective and, occasionally, our spirits burn within us and we're given as much of a taste of glory as these bodies can handle. But it's just a taste. It's just the earnest. Through our salvation, God has said, "I'm serious about this thing," and we get the promise that ***we are His***. We were purchased by the payment of the blood of Jesus and when that purchase is fully redeemed, we will receive the same inheritance as Jesus Himself. I always think of a verse in Psalm 139 when I consider things like this: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...*"
Now… finally, why does all of that make salvation like a helmet? One of the words I used to describe the Roman soldier's helmet was *heavy*. Have you ever had to wear heavy head gear of any kind? When you first put it on, it feels awkward and kind of makes you feel like you might fall over if you bend too far one way or the other. After a while, you become somewhat acclimated to it, but anytime you move your head, you think about it again. I think that is the exact reason Paul used a helmet to exemplify salvation. Because even in the fiercest battles and the most terrible hardships of our lives, with every move we make, we should be reminded of the promise of salvation.

It's already been mentioned that our faith drives away doubt, but both our shield of faith and our helmet of salvation help to guard against weakness and discouragement as well. Satan would have us to believe that we're defeated and incapable of

overcoming the obstacles we might face in life. That promise of salvation, though, is equal to the promise of victory! And if we can go into our battles knowing we've already won, just imagine what fierce warriors we will become.

Character Example

The 11th chapter of Hebrews contains what we sometimes call the "Hall of Faith" and describes those mentioned there in this way: *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (11:13)." Abraham is one of these and the specific instance of faith sited here is when he took his own son to the altar of sacrifice. Abraham always comes to mind when we think of faith, but he was certainly familiar with the promise of salvation as well. In Abraham's case, the promise extended far beyond him and into the many generations that would follow him and be called the children of Israel, God's chosen people.

Although the wonderful promise God had given Abraham depended upon his having descendants, Abraham's faith was so great that he was willing to sacrifice his only son, resting fully upon the fact that God was able to raise him up again. Abraham *knew* that God would keep His promise and not even death would stand in the way of that.

LESSON FOUR

WEAPON READY

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:17

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

We've examined each piece of our spiritual armor over the course of this study and have finally reached the weapon. Although the shield offers some amount of offensive ability, it can't be considered a true weapon. Like the shield, the sword is both offensive and defensive, but it's primary purpose is attacking the enemy, wounding that enemy, and ultimately killing him.

Before looking deeper into our spiritual sword, we should examine the Roman soldier's physical sword – the *gladius*. A Roman soldier likely carried other weapons (a dagger, javelins or darts, etc.), but his sword was his foremost weapon. Like most swords we're familiar with, it was two-edged and tapered to a point. The handle was specially designed to provide a good grip and the hilt was heavily decorated. As a final touch, the owners name was engraved on the blade. He carried it in a scabbard that hung from his belt until he needed to use it, in which case, obviously, he had to carry it in his hand.

As you might imagine, the sword was used for slashing and stabbing. The *gladius* was undoubtedly very heavy, not to mention very sharp. Anybody strong enough to hold a sword like this, could sling it around and do some damage pretty much just because of the sword's own qualities. What set a Roman soldier's abilities apart was his training. Early on in this study, we discussed the sophistication of the Roman military. Part of that sophistication lay in their intense training methods. They went through levels of training, practicing with wooden "dummy" weapons which were twice the weight of their actual weapons. They "fought" wooden stakes first and eventually moved up to sparring against their fellow soldiers. All of this practice made for expert use of his armor and, particularly, his weapon. He could move his heavy sword with expert preciseness, which made him a terror on the battlefield.

Ephesians 6:17b
...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

We learn from the earliest age that the Bible is our weapon, which is true, but it goes a little deeper than that. There are those who believe that the only method by which God speaks to His children is through the written words on the pages of the Bible. We can indeed hear from God through His written Word, but it's the Holy Spirit that makes the Bible *the living Word*. Matthew Henry's commentary on this verse says, "It is called the sword of the Spirit, because it is of the Spirit's inditing..." *Inditing* means *to put down in writing*. So, Henry's statement points to the idea that this

sword actually *belongs* to the Spirit. This makes sense because we know that all scripture was inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) by the impression of the Holy Spirit. And if the writers were inspired by the Spirit, it also makes sense that the reader would receive it in the same way. Any literate person can read words written on a page, but the Holy Spirit delivers it or, perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that He *applies* it. So, we can see by this that our "sword" isn't just a book that can sit on a shelf, but the presence of the Spirit which inspires and delivers it. And, most importantly, the application thereof.

Now, how is the Word of God like a sword? Perhaps the most obvious comparison can be found in Hebrews 4:12, *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword…"* Perfect! We can cut down any enemy with that! Right? Let's finish that verse: *"…piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* The first person this "sword" is used on is ourselves. Much like the Roman soldier training with a practice sword twice the weight of his own weapon, we can't expect to know how to defend ourselves with the truths of God's word without first feeling the weight of those truths in our own hearts. That weight manifests as the guilt of sin by which we're drawn to a place of repentance. It's only after we are reconciled with God that we are able to have a relationship with Him and come to truly know the truths of His Word and use them to attack the enemy.

After a person is saved, it's important to continue "training" just as the Roman soldier undoubtedly continued to train regardless of how much experience he had. It is vital that a child of God is knowledgeable of the scriptures. Again, the words on the page are important and memorization is an effective tool, but it's only truly effective when it's applied. Not long ago, I experienced God's miraculous ability of applying His Word like I never had before. For two years, I was drawn repeatedly to the same verses in scripture. I studied everything about it, I was reminded of it everywhere I turned, and I thought about it constantly. It was actually kind of exhausting at times. I didn't know why until a situation arose in my life to which it applied *perfectly*. God let me know immediately that this situation was the sole reason why I had been so drawn to the same scriptures over and over again for two long years. That situation passed and I no longer feel the need to scour those particular verses, although they will always hold a special place in my heart. Application of God's Word likely doesn't look like that for everyone and it hasn't looked like that for me every single time; I feel like that's a pretty extreme example. Sometimes it's as simple as seeing or hearing something that reminds you of a verse you're familiar with. It's a beautiful thought to consider that we can see God *everywhere* if we just look for Him.

Most of the time even after we're saved, our sword has to point inward. It is a weapon and weapons are intended to protect us against those who would do us harm, but unfortunately the seeds

that Satan plants are sown right into our minds and hearts sometimes. After we're saved, he can't get to our souls, but he sure can mess with everything else about us. Take that verse from Hebrews 4:12 that we discussed above and apply it to a saved person: *"…a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* Now, consider the things that human beings in general are tempted to: doubt, fear, covetousness, lust, anger, jealousy, hate, discontentment, discouragement. Just to name a few. All of those things are sinful and Satan loves to blindside us with any number of those things. Please keep in mind that Satan has never forced anyone to do anything. He makes slippery little suggestions, he slithers and whispers, he knows where our weak points are and ferociously attacks them. So, most times when we read or remember God's Word, its protective defenses are aimed at our own human self. That verse from Hebrews makes me think of doing surgery; the Word of God *divides asunder* and cuts out what doesn't belong. It works in conjunction with our shield – *faith* – which, once Satan is cut out, further resists him and drives him away.

There are times when it becomes necessary to fight outwardly with our sword. Hopefully, God will give each of us the opportunity at some point in our lives to tell someone about Him. Sometimes in those situations, it becomes necessary to defend what we believe in which case it is absolutely essential that everything we say comes from the Bible and from God's leadership. We are unable to draw lost people to Christ in and of ourselves, but perhaps God will allow us to speak the truths of His Word, which *is able* to pierce the hearts of the lost.

Thankfully, the present generations have not yet been required to defend the freedom we have to worship in this country, but those days may lie ahead. Who knows if we'll always have such ready access to our physical Bible. The fact that the scriptures are so readily available to us is a blessing and, at the same time, may be one of our downfalls. We should be careful not to take it for granted; our spiritual forefathers had their Bibles taken from them. If those things lie ahead for us, may we look to God for grace and strength to stand upon His Word and may we ever live, regardless of situation, in the light of the sacrifice that was made on our behalf.

Another observation in Matthew Henry's commentary is that this sword of ours is like Goliath's in that there is none like it (1 Samuel 21:9). It is a powerful weapon, but it is so much more. I'm going to close this lesson by listing a few verses describing God's word.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2 Timothy 3:16)
Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. (Proverbs 30:5)
For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:8)

Character Example

A great biblical example of someone who came to effectively use God's Word as a weapon is Paul himself, the writer of our key scripture. Consider that prior to Paul's salvation, he was well-learned and very knowledgeable concerning Old Testament scripture. Without salvation, knowledge of the Bible is only just that; it cannot be a useful weapon and, in many cases, instead becomes a dangerous tool that is easily misused. In Paul's case, his knowledge likely became a springboard in his persecution of Christ's followers.

It's important to remember that Satan himself knows the scriptures and will use them out of context or however he can to distract saved people from doing the will of God. He even tried to tempt Jesus using scripture! So it should come as no great surprise that he attempts to twist God's Word and use it for his own devices in our lives. After Paul was saved, he gained access to all the other "pieces" of spiritual armor and his former knowledge of the Old Testament began to be sharpened and honed into a powerful spiritual weapon. Furthermore, through God's inspiration, Paul's contributions added to *our* sword. In our key scripture alone, we can see how Paul used his knowledge of the Old Testament and, with God's help, expanded upon it to give those believers in Ephesus (as well as all of us throughout time) a strengthening and unifying picture of the specific ways in which God assists us.

Paul is set apart in that God inspired him to write part of His word, but in every other way, we are no different from him. God is able to apply scripture to our lives and make it applicable and useful to us as well.

LESSON FIVE

BATTLE!

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:11-13

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

We've reached our final lesson in this series and we now know how to be fully equipped and ready for battle, as far as our key scripture is concerned. Way back in the introductory material to this series, we looked at the words *whole armor* and how Paul began and ended his initial instructions with the admonition to be sure we get the whole thing. Such repetition lets us know how important it is. Hanging on to just a piece or two of our spiritual armor isn't good enough; to get the full effect, we have to have the full armor. The reason for this is that every piece of armor, whether physical or this spiritual armor of ours, depends upon the other pieces to be entirely effective. Without the foundation of truth, everything else becomes useless. Likewise, failing to practice that truth and losing our integrity would cause us to slip farther and farther from God, which would, in one way or another, end up disturbing the feeling of peace we have when we're in fellowship with Him. When a child of God moves away from God, there are typically the natural byproducts of feelings like doubt and fear, which chinks away at the faith we have in God's ability to protect and help us. And with the loss of faith comes the loss of hope in our salvation almost simultaneously. At that point, the Word of God becomes less of a weapon and more of an albatross because, let's face it, reading the Bible without the assistance of the Holy Spirit feels a little overwhelming and maybe even somewhat pointless (especially if you find yourself in the middle of a long line of *begats*). You could choose any two pieces of this armor and come up with ways in which they work together and depend upon each other to accomplish their individual purposes.

Our key scripture ends with verse 17. Verse 18 says, "*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"*

So, it's true that each and every piece of our spiritual armor is equally important, but perhaps the *most* important thing is that it's all wrapped in prayer. It's possible for a child of God to slip farther and farther away from Him until they feel like they couldn't possibly access any truth or peace or faith or hope. Things happen in the lives of some people that make them so angry or hurt that they allow themselves to turn away from God, from church, from the Bible for so long that it seems they've all but forgotten they were ever saved. Consider the prodigal son. When he demanded his inheritance and left his father's house, he certainly seemed to forget his father and the life he had previously.

For a little while. But things went sour and he began to consider going back to his father's house. Isn't that exactly what we do as children of God sometimes? That's *exactly* what I do, I'm sorry to say. I wander away from the Lord and go my own way until things start getting tough. Then I start considering that maybe… just maybe… I should go to my prayer place and get that taken care of, but I put it off just like this son did. He stayed away a while longer. I always stay away a while longer until I am absolutely wallowing in my pitiful state, looking for any kind of sustenance anywhere I can get it. That's usually about the time that I decide I better get serious about really seeking help because I know (and I've always known), God is the only source of help. And here's the best similarity between me and the prodigal son: I only have to start toward my Heavenly Father and He comes to meet me without fail. He comes so much farther to meet me than I go to meet Him. Not just some of the time… *every time!* That's why prayer is such an important aspect of being an armor wearer. Because there are times when the armor falls away and prayer is the only thing we can cling to. And as we pray, God adds our armor pieces back to us.

Another important aspect of our spiritual lives is meditation. Prayer is of the utmost importance, as is studying God's Word, but many times it's in the seemingly random moments that as we ponder over the things we've read or reminisce over special times of prayer that it all seems to come together. It's in these moments, sometimes, that God shows us an answer that we never expected or even knew to ask for (which reminds me of Ephesians 3:20). Those are the moments that truly keep our armor in tip-top shape.

Now, let's switch gears here and discuss something we've only touched on briefly up to this point. On the student page for each lesson, Objective #2 at the top of the page has been about identifying our enemy. We know from verse 11 of our key scripture that, point blank, we are standing against the "wiles of the devil." Satan is the enemy. Done. Verse 13 gives a reason that looks a little different, though: "*… take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day…*" Obviously, we know that we can equate evil with sin and Satan, but I think it's pertinent that Paul told us specifically to stand against the wiles of Satan *and* to withstand in the evil day. The terminology "enemies, foreign and domestic" comes to mind. Most of the time, the attacks that we must sustain are domestic, meaning, in this case, internal attacks that are specific to us. Satan doesn't have the *omni-* qualities of God, but he is intensely perceptive and is able to recognize the specific things that trip us up. So, in most cases, my battle is personal and against the things that most tempt me to sin or most disturb my personal peace with God. Those are the *wiles* Paul referred to. The armor is effective in helping us to stand against those things.

Our spiritual forefathers (and even Paul himself) suffered terrible persecution. Christians in other parts of the world today are experiencing

the same sorts of things. We should be all too aware of the possibility that those days lie ahead of us as well and that knowledge should drive us to our knees. These are the *evil days* to which Paul refers – the foreign or external attacks – and our armor is just as effective for those kinds of battles, too. Whether we're going head to head with Satan or facing an army of the enemies of God, our assurance lies with the Head Armor Wearer. We know that all scripture is inspired by God Himself, but Paul (who we know was extremely well-read) had heard of this armor idea from another part of scripture before he wrote it down:

[15]Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. [16]And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. ***[17]For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.*** *[18]According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies…*

That's Isaiah 59:15-17 and it was written over *700 years* before Christ was born. It's no surprise that Paul had read the Old Testament, but he obviously expected his readers (*US!*) to know it, too. The armor Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians is powerful and effective and it's amazing to consider how God will equip us to stand against the enemy. But reading this scripture in Isaiah tells us that our armor is based on the armor that God Himself wears.

You'll notice that God's armor has a couple extra pieces that ours doesn't have: garments of vengeance and the cloak of zeal. So much of an army's enthusiasm for what they're fighting for depends upon that of their leader and the same is true for us. Zeal to fight against evil isn't something we can just whip up and do all by ourselves; evil is too big and too overwhelming and we'd soon be running the other direction if we depended upon wrapping ourselves in our own zeal. We are swept into the zeal of God in those moments we most need it. And, as for vengeance… vengeance is something that God has claimed as His own:

To me belongeth vengeance and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. Deuteronomy 32:35

He will repay! Vengeance is *His*! He wears it like a garment. God is loving and longsuffering and full of mercy, but in the day of His judgment, His enemies will recognize Him by the garment He wears and will prefer to be crushed by rocks than to face Him and His perfect justice.

For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, ***to fight for you*** *against your enemies, to save you. (Deuteronomy 20:4)*

…God is faithful, who will not suffer you

*to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also **make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)*

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; **I have overcome the world**. (John 16:33)*

*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, **who can be against us?** (Romans 8:31)*

We can expect life to be difficult. Our days are few and full of trouble, right? But we serve a God Who promises vengeance to His enemies, we have a Comforter Who lives in our very souls and weaves precious promises into the fiber of who we are, and we have a Savior Who death could not keep in the grave.

This is Who we're following into battle.

We may have to endure many things before we reach the end, but the end is nothing but *victory*!

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:55-58