

Maintaining Freedom

Spiritual attack is simply a part of our present reality.
Jesus couldn't avoid it, the early church couldn't avoid it, and we can't avoid it.

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

What are some ways we can maintain our spiritual freedom and effectiveness in light of the ongoing assault on our lives?

Discuss as a group.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

¹¹ *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

¹³ *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.*

¹⁴ *Stand firm then, with the*

belt of truth buckled around your waist,

with the **breastplate of righteousness** *in place,*

¹⁵ *and with your* **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.**

¹⁶ *In addition to all this, 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.*

¹⁸ *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 for all the saints.

In what ways does the armor of God help us stand our ground?

Discuss as a group.

Understanding the Armor

Discuss why each piece of armor is essential for standing firm against Satan's attacks.

Salvation

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

How is salvation a critical piece of our armor?

Discuss as a group.

Salvation means we've already won the battle, we cannot be defeated, and our eternal future is secure. This is all guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life.

Though I still have to battle with Satan until the day Christ returns, I have been given authority to fight spiritual battles in the name of Jesus Christ. I have already been given the power to defeat the works of the enemy. Because I have salvation protecting me, I can enter the battle with confidence.

Satan will often sow seeds of doubt regarding our salvation and try to cause us to question our faith. If we give in to these thoughts, we become rendered ineffective in our spiritual life.

Colossians 3:1-4 (NIV)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

How does understanding our salvation help us in the battle?

If we keep proper perspective of our salvation, then we are free to focus on faithfully serving God, in whatever he calls us to do, until he returns. We don't need to worry about fighting for our future; the battle has already been won.

Romans 8:37-39 (NIV)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How does it feel to know that you cannot be defeated, if you simply abide with Christ?

The Helmet of Salvation is our Guarantee of Victory

Righteousness

Colossians 1:22-23 (NIV)

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

How is righteousness a critical piece of our defense?

Righteousness is necessary because, without it, we would not be able to stand before God at the Day of Judgment without fear. Because we are sinful beings, we are not able to be righteous – no matter how “good” we are. Satan tries to accuse us of all those things we have done wrong, and he is right: we ARE guilty and deserving of death. Fortunately for us, Jesus forgave us all our sin and placed on us his own righteousness (1John 2:1). As a result, we are declared holy and blameless before the Father. Therefore, when Satan tries to accuse us, we can remember that we have been forgiven and are now declared righteous by God. We can approach our relationship with God with confidence based on the righteousness of Christ.

Satan will obviously try to tempt us to not live righteously. In so doing he renders us less effective and robs us of confidence, joy and peace.

How can we resist in light of Satan's continuous attack?

Discuss as a group.

Matthew 26:41 (NIV)

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

1) Watch:

Discern if a temptation is being offered by Satan with the objective of defeating you in your spiritual walk. Satan will be very deceptive in how he encourages you to sin. He attacks at the most opportune times and in moments of our spiritual weakness. If you are not discerning in your decisions, you will give way to temptation and be open to attack.

2) Pray:

In and of yourselves, you will find some temptation too difficult to resist. God always provides a way out from temptation (1Cor 10:13), but it is dependent on the help of his wisdom, his strength, and his leading. Resisting temptation ultimately has to be rooted in a deep relationship with God and a reliance on the Holy Spirit strengthening us through the Word.

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

What are some “old self” things we need to put aside to be spiritually effective?

In what practical ways can we put on the “new self” this week?

Truth***John 8:31-32 (NIV)***

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

What are some of the lies you’ve bought into in the past? What bondage did they create?
Sharing time

How might Satan try to hinder us in this area of our defense?

Satan’s only ability to control us exists through deception. This is how he started in the Garden of Eden, and this is what he continues to do today.

Satan will always try to deceive us in two primary ways:

- 1) Our view of [God/Jesus](#)
- 2) Our view of [the Bible](#)

Every deception we struggle with will ultimately be rooted in one of these two distortions.

Any cult or false religion will differ on one of these two main points. Further, at any time Satan starts to influence a person’s life you will notice they will start to struggle with these same issues. In order to continue in a sinful direction they need to justify it by either denouncing God or rejecting his Word.

How can we resist in light of this strategy of Satan’s?

Build your Relationship with God
Know the Bible

How will we be more vulnerable in everyday life if we drop this piece of armor?

If we stop using truth to determine our beliefs and actions, we become open to all forms of influence. Ultimately we will either trust in our **feelings** or in our **limited perspective** to guide us. The Bible tells us that both of these life approaches will lead us to ruin.

Neither our feelings nor our limited knowledge are sufficient to lead us in truth.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Isaiah 55:9 (NIV)

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Peace

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In what way are we more prepared and ready for spiritual battle if we have the good news of the peace of God?

We will have boldness and confidence in our lives that will give us a firm footing wherever we go. The idea of feet “fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace” is spiritual stability.

How will we be more vulnerable in everyday life if we drop this piece of armor?

The opposite of peace is anxiety or fear. It is rooted in a distrust of God’s provision and protection. In these moments of anxiety we have very unstable footing as we do not confidently rely on God to lead us to victory.

- Without confidence and boldness we will cower away from any spiritual onslaught and we will not push forward with the good news of peace.
- If we do not have peace, what good news do we have to share with others?
- If we are not at peace ourselves, we cannot lead others to peace with God.

Share a time when you didn’t feel God’s peace. How did that affect your spiritual stability and effectiveness in moving forward?

Sharing

How can we develop a deeper assurance and peace in our relationship with God?

1) **Surrender everything to Jesus Christ**

Let anxiety and fear fade away as the problem is now in his hands. Make a decision to let Jesus do whatever he wants with "his" life. You've given it to him, now it is up to him to determine how best to use your life for his purposes.

2) **Take steps of faith.**

Discover how sure footed you can be as you rely on God to meet your every need in areas where you feel you have little control.

As you step into new territory for Jesus Christ you will discover that God sustains you and your confidence will continue to grow. Fear and insecurity will diminish and be replaced by a sense of boldness to accomplish more for the kingdom of God.

Faith

Ephesians 6:16 (NIV)

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

What fiery dart does faith extinguish? Doubt

What areas do we tend to doubt God?

Love, Word, Purposes, Power, Provision, our Value, our Significance, his Authority

Which are you inclined to question the most? Why?

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

What is the relationship between faith and hope?

Discuss as a group.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

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

Discuss and try to explain these next two statements:

Faith creates Hope

Our faith in Jesus Christ, and what he accomplished in his death and resurrection, give us hope of eternal life. Our future is guaranteed and it is wonderful. We are now anxiously waiting for the outcome of our faith to be fulfilled in the return of Christ.

Hope increases Faith

Because we have such a wonderful hope, it gives us the courage and strength to continue on in the battle. When our faith starts to waver, the hope of Christ builds up our faith so that we will stand firm. Colossians 1:5 talks about our faith and love that spring from the hope we have. Hope gives life to both the way we love and how we live by faith.

Colossians 1:5 (NIV)

the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven

No Faith – No Hope! No Hope – No Faith!

Word of God

The Bible: our greatest defense, our greatest weapon.
In what way is scripture our greatest defense?

John 17:15-17 (NIV)

My prayer is not that you take them [his disciples] out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

God's truth protects us from Satan's deceptions by making us aware of his schemes, renewing our minds, and by leading us in paths of righteousness. God's truth applied to our lives sets us apart (sanctified) and makes us pure. We know right and wrong based on God's truth not Satan's lies.

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.



Jeremiah 23:29 (NIV)

"Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

In what way is scripture our greatest weapon?

Scripture gives us every truth we need to break down Satan's strongholds. We move forward by the power of God's word, both in our own lives and in the process of setting others free.

It makes us effective in our spiritual battle against Satan's rule in this world.

What are the implications for our life if we do not know how to use the Bible effectively?

Armor

SALVATION
RIGHTEOUSNESS
TRUTH
PEACE
FAITH
WORD OF GOD

Provides

Guarantee of Victory
Freedom from Accusation
Freedom from Bondage
Stability and Confidence
Hope and encouragement to move forward
Effectiveness

Which piece of armor do you find you tend to drop the most?

What steps might you take this week to ensure you have securely fastened that piece to your life?

James 4:7-8 (NIV)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.

PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
DAY 1		
<p><i>Ephesians 6:18-20 (NIV)</i> <i>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 for all the saints.</i></p> <p><i>¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.</i></p>	<p>On top of the armor, Paul also says we should pray for all the saints.</p> <p>Why does he encourage this?</p> <p>Do you ever pray for the spiritual strength and protection of other believers?</p> <p>Do you ever pray that people in your church would fearlessly proclaim Jesus Christ?</p> <p>Why not spend time today simply praying for the spiritual protection and spiritual effectiveness of people in your church and around the world.</p> <p>Pray this also for yourself!</p>	

PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
DAY 2		
<p>2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV) <i>Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.</i></p> <p>James 4:7-8 (NIV) <i>Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.</i></p>	<p>If we have such incredible armor, why should we need to flee?</p> <p>In the first verse we are not just to flee one thing, but to pursue the opposite. What are you pursuing?</p> <p>When we flee one thing and pursue another, why does that make Satan flee?</p> <p>What areas do you need to flee from this week?</p> <p>What do you need to pursue this week?</p>	

PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
DAY 3		
<p>1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV) <i>Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.</i></p>	<p>How does sexual immorality affect a person on a deeper level than other sins?</p> <p>In our culture we have become very immune to sexual immorality. It is so commonplace that we believe it is almost normal.</p> <p>In what ways have you perhaps crossed the line of what God defines as appropriate in your perspective?</p> <p>Do we have a right to do whatever we want with our body? Why or why not?</p> <p>If our lives/bodies actually belong to Jesus Christ, am I truly using my life and body in a way that glorifies God?</p> <p>Are there some things I'm doing right now that do not bring joy to Jesus?</p> <p>How can I flee from these things this week?</p>	



PASSAGE

**THOUGHTS TO
CONSIDER**

APPLY 1 POINT TODAY

DAY 4

1 Timothy 6:6-11 (NIV)

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But you, man of God, **flee** from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*

If God promises to meet all our needs, why do we always feel we need more money?

Why are we so discontent with what we have?

If the stuff we have hasn't brought us joy and fulfillment, why do we keep thinking more stuff will?

How can the pursuit of money lead one away from God?

Why does this result in grief?

Instead of pursuing more money, what does Paul recommend you pursue?

How might that actually bring more joy and fulfillment into your life?

What does your cheque book show about what you believe will bring you joy and fulfillment?

Why not take some time to look at your budget to see what you value as the highest priority in your life?

How can you become free from the love of money and what you believe it offers you?

PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
DAY 5		
<p>1 Corinthians 10:12-14 (NIV) <i>So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.</i></p> <p><i>But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.</i></p> <p>¹⁴ <i>Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.</i></p>	<p>Why does Paul caution those who think they are standing firm?</p> <p>Why do we always think our temptation is stronger than what others face?</p> <p>Why do we sometimes feel the temptation is too strong for us to resist?</p> <p>When tempted, have you ever looked for the open door – the way out?</p> <p>Is it comforting to know you can actually resist temptation?</p> <p>What is the connection between idolatry and giving into temptation?</p> <p>Jesus resisted temptation by taking a firm stand on the truth of God's Word (Matthew 4/Luke 4).</p> <p>In areas in which you are frequently tempted, find some scripture passage you can declare and stand on the next time you are challenged.</p>	