

Made for More

6. More Victory

March 28, 2021

Welcome to week 6 of Made for More! I'm Christy, Regional Pastor for North Fayette and I am so glad you are here! Through this series we have been growing and learning about the book of Ephesians and each week builds on the previous week. If you are new today, don't worry, you won't be lost, but I encourage you to check out the series online as we have grown tremendously together.

Last week, we talked about being sustained and creating healthy habits in our lives, and that is going to be important as it all culminates with today's message of More Victory! Let's pray and ask God to help us out!

PRAY

Have you ever been to the store or been somewhere out in public and saw someone's kid dressed up in a superhero costume? Some of you shook your head yes. But for those of you who shook your head no, you obviously didn't shop where I shopped when my kid was little.

I would say to her, "be a big girl; go get dressed, we need to leave" and she would show up, she's got her cape, let's roll. I can remember one time we came home from the store and my husband pulled into the driveway about the same time. He looked at us and said, "did you let her go in public like that?"

I knew better than to get fussed up about what my kid was wearing. I mean, why worry, I was dressed appropriately. And in her mind, she was dressed appropriately too!

If you are going to the store...you better put on your cape. You don't know what you might encounter there. Funny thing is, Paul, in Ephesians Chapter 6, he gives us a lesson in proper attire. I have an appreciation for fashion, so I think Paul and I would have gotten along just fine. Let's read what we are talking about!

Turn with me to Ephesians 6:10-18 (NLT)

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. 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. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

In verse 10, Paul is telling us to "be strong in the Lord." It's not our power that makes us strong in the Lord, it's his power! And the writer, Paul, gives us an important reason why we need to be in God's strength. Verse 11 says, "so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

We are in a spiritual battle. I think at times we can over emphasize the battle and at times we underemphasize the battle. Over emphasize because even when we feel beaten down and weary, we know the battle is already won! But we can under play it too, and not even be aware that we are in a battle. And every warrior needs to be ready. Ephesians 6 tells us we are at war!

So many of you may feel like that. You have fought hard all year long. You have been in a place of prolonged stress. We get weak, tired, and it seems like there is darkness all around us. And we must remember that folks we know have been through the same year we have been through! They are tired, cranky, worn out, depressed, angry, you name it. And you can start to feel like people are the problem!

But God loves people! And we want to love them well, too, so that means we need to remember the words of Ephesians!

The war is spiritual, not physical!

We learn from this passage that we are in a spiritual battle. We are not battling people! We are called to love people, not fight them! We are battling dark, spiritual forces that are at work in the heavenlies! And without the proper gear, we might trip up! We can wound ourselves or wound others!

To be ready for the fight, we must dress for it! If you have never observed it, something happens when a child puts on a cape. They walk taller, jump off tables, run really fast. They become powerful!

And Paul gives us instructions on what to wear! He emphasizes saying put on the armor of God and then he says it again, put on the full armor and don't leave anything out. He adds further instruction saying, so when the day of evil comes, not if, but when! You will be able to stand your ground!

This is important for us. Everyone who is a follower of Jesus is in this fight. There are no exemptions. When you surrender to Jesus you enlisted for battle. You may not have known it at the time! But if you were like me, it did not take too long to realize, this was a lot harder than pray the prayer and come to church.

When I made Jesus Lord, I had this love/hate relationship with my newfound faith. Love because I had new life in Christ, hate because it required something of me! And from time to time, you may feel like you are losing. You may feel like the odds are against you. You may feel like you are out of steam. You may feel like you can't take one more step. You might feel like you are in over your head, but here's what Paul says – get dressed!

Victory is available to you!

The war is already won!

And here's what we need...a belt of truth and a breastplate of righteousness.

Truth is important. As followers of Jesus, we must be committed to the truth and to righteousness. That means I'm guarding my heart and mind and asking God, show me what is true. Show me how to be righteous. Show me how I need to change to reflect Jesus. To win in spiritual battles, we must be dedicated to truth! Truth matters.

Satan is called a liar; he is called the father of lies. Jesus said in John 8:44 that when Satan speaks, he is talking in his native tongue, and that's lies! Jesus was saying how do you know Satan is lying? When his lips move!

So, if we want to win, we need to be dedicated to what is true and righteous! So, we put on a belt of truth and cover up our heart with the breastplate of righteousness!

My dad used to say, your word is your bond. What he meant by that was, you need to be believable. And let's face it, our story is outrageous! We follow Jesus, who came to earth as a man, who lived perfectly, was sinless, falsely accused and executed on a cross, died, was buried, rose again, and lives today!

My God died and beat death and is now alive and reigns forevermore! And because this history of ours is so spectacular, true, but spectacular. We have victory through our truth! We overcome by the blood of the lamb, the blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony!

There is victory in our words! We need to put on our belts. Our words must be true.

Paul goes on. With this outfit we are going to need some shoes! I love shoes. These weren't just any shoes. Paul was describing an outfit that the Roman soldiers would wear. He was very familiar because he had been in jail and had been guarded by these guys. He knew what they wore to battle.

He said to have your feet ready for peace. People who are not ready for battle will fall for the scheme of the enemy, falsely believing we are at war with others. We can lose our victory by not being ready to be peacemakers.

The peace we live in and the peace we offer others marks us as the children of God. Jesus said in the greatest sermon he ever preached, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."

There is victory in peace. Inside of us, we are wired to be at peace. Peace was God's plan. Peace is counter cultural.

Culture tells us to fight. Culture tells us to take what is ours. Culture tells us to demand our rights. But Jesus tells us we are blessed if we are peacemakers. In fact, when we deal with those who want to fight in a way that brings peace, we are showing evidence of the fact that we belong to God.

When we bring peace, people will take notice. Jesus said, we will be called the children of God. Paul was saying we need the soldier's shoes for peace. Roman soldiers had what would have been cleats. They had spikes that came out of the bottom of their shoes to stand their ground. I think Paul was saying we don't want to lose any ground by not making peace.

Be ready for it! If we want to advance and take ground...we will need to be peacemakers. People all over Pittsburgh are looking for peacemakers. They don't even know it. They are longing for peace that is counter cultural. Let's be on high alert, taking ground with peace.

Paul then tells us we need a shield of faith! The purpose of this shield of faith is to extinguish the fiery darts that come our way. I get this vision in my mind of the scene in Wonder Woman where she's walking through a war zone holding up her shield. She's under heavy fire but advances anyway!

There is victory in faith!

We can take one more step knowing that even though the enemy is throwing fiery darts, this battle is won! We can move forward. We can take ground. I don't have to be afraid of the outcome. I'm not saying you won't be nervous; I'm not saying you won't have inner fears, but what I know is that faith moves forward. And with every step of faith, the enemy loses ground!

And finally, we need to protect our head with the helmet of salvation and our offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

There is victory in protecting our mind and repeating God's word.

Paul talks about putting on the helmet of salvation. All battles begin in the mind. Not only can we fall prey to Satan lying to us, sometimes we lie to ourselves in our thought life. We counteract those lies with what God says to be true. His written word to us is the standard of truth.

We have this uncanny ability to underestimate sin in our lives. To underestimate the ways that we care for our spirit. And protecting our mind matters. And we use our sword, God's word as the weapon of war. Daily time in God's word helps fill our minds with what is true. He helps us combat thoughts that work against us to have victory.

Last week, we recited Psalm 23 together.

I happen to love Psalm 23 because it's a picture of us walking with God. Often it is a Psalm read at funerals because it's this beautiful picture of what our life here is and what the life to come is. Psalm 23 talks about God giving us everything we need. God will give us peace and rest. And it doesn't sugar coat this life of following Jesus, when I walk through the valley in death's shadow, I do not have to fear. He is with me.

He sets a table in the presence of my enemies. My enemy is still there, but I will feast because I have victory. It goes on to say, surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

I get this beautiful picture of our people, Crossroaders who belong to Jesus walking in victory and goodness and love follows you. It's like a boat going through water leaving this wake, this wake of goodness and love wherever you go. You are so filled up with Jesus...you are encountering Him, resting in His victory, and goodness and love are your wake washing over those that you encounter. Surely, they will know you are the children of God.

Finally, as I close, I want to share this short story about what was going on in my life a few years back when I was under tremendous pressure. I was getting dressed for battle, but it was a battle in my own strength. I wasn't being strong in the Lord!

I came to Crossroads in 2015 to lead at the Weirton Campus. We promptly doubled the size of the campus and had to add another service. And as promptly as I grew it, I grew it back down to 130 people. You're welcome. 😊

We had this quick success and we added groups and people got engaged, and then something happened, and it seemed like all was failing in the natural. This took a toll on me in a big way. Spiritually, mentally, and physically.

You see, I had come from a church where I had been on the team and experienced growing the church from 110 to over 450 on average. And in the size town I was in, that was a huge church. I had read all the books; done all the plans, listened to all the podcasts. I just didn't know what to do. And it seemed like we were losing. In my mind, I thought, "I'll quit before I ruin this thing."

With all of this going on, I wasn't getting enough sleep, I didn't have my belt of truth, I listened to the lies of the enemy and it began to sink into my heart.

One day on the way to a meeting. I was just going to be on time. Not early and maybe a minute or two late, I was coming down the hill; Satan was lying to me. I was busy lying to myself and suddenly, I got a picture in my mind of the railroad tracks I would cross in about a mile. And in that picture, I saw the lights flashing.

Now, I had never seen a train there ever before. You would think this should be an indication to pay attention here. As I got close to the railroad tracks, the lights started flashing. And I didn't even brake. I looked to my left, and off in the distance. The train whistle blew. I don't know how far it was, maybe half a mile? a quarter of a mile? It wasn't close, but it wasn't far. And my heart started pounding.

I walked into the meeting and sat down. I looked around the room and knew, all these people are sane. In fact, it took me a couple of days to tell my husband because I would be mad if he did that. If the situation were reversed, and he did that, I would think he couldn't be trusted to drive anywhere and was making bad decisions.

As I sat there in the room, looking at the normal people, half tuned out, God whispered to me. And it was this stern whispering, "the enemy is trying to take you out and you are cooperating with him."

Some of you here can identify with that. Instead of having goodness and love following you because you are overflowing with your encounters with Jesus, you are allowing the enemy to have unlawful access to you like I was. You are being strong, but not in the Lord. You are not sleeping at night. You are working hard, but in your own strength and not his. God wants us to get dressed so we can stand against the scheme of the enemy!

We must protect our head! We must protect our heart! We must make our feet ready for peace! We must have his word ready to combat the lies of the enemy!

We are at war, and the enemy is trying to take us out! And some of you know what I mean. When God spoke to my heart, "the enemy is trying to take you out, and you are cooperating with him!" I repented. Sometimes we just need to repent when we aren't really in the battle. To be clear, I was in a battle, but it wasn't the battle God called me to be in.

The situation turned around. God showed me His plan for the campus. We started "Talk to God Tuesday" and had prayer warriors go to battle. I spent time getting dressed in His truth and listening to what God wanted to do in the life of the people in Weirton. And our leaders did the same thing. I left Weirton to come here because it was a healthy, thriving campus. If I had been getting dressed and ready to stand, I would have realized, victory was for me. The Weirton Campus has access to Victory. The North Fayette Campus has access to Victory. Your life group has access to victory!

Today we are going to right what is wrong. If you feel you have been cooperating with the one who wants to take you out, today we are going to stop that. We are going be

strong in the Lord, no longer our own strength, but a strength that comes from heaven, and having done all we are to do, we will stand. We will no longer fight people but fight in the heavenlies. Our war cry will be prayer and worship and resting in His power.

Today we are going to experience God's presence together as we worship Him. In the next few moments, we will worship God and have some prayer ministry listening to what He wants to do in us. I encourage you to be open to what God wants for you today.

Some of you will be like me on that one day needing to repent. God I'm sorry, show me your truth. Some of you will be set free. Some of you will get a revelation of what it means to be a peacemaker. But what I want all of you to know today is that you were made for victory. More Victory.