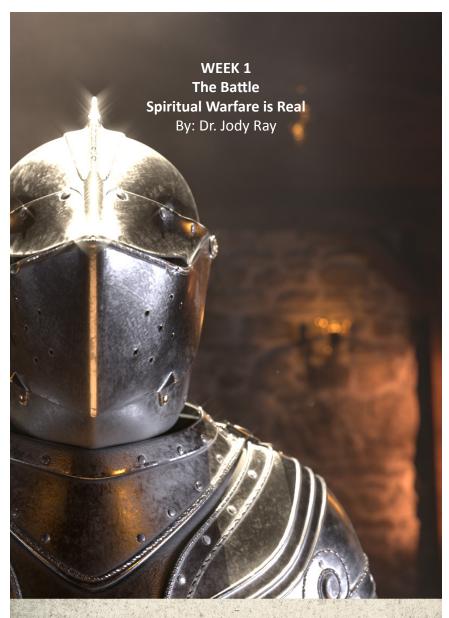
BATTLE

EMPOWERED BY FAITH

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"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 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 10-12, NIV)

INTRODUCTION

During one of the darkest periods of World War II, after the collapse of France and before America got involved, Winston Churchill wrote that the question in the minds of both friends and foes was this: "Will Britain surrender too?" At the time he made a speech that contained this sentence: "What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends on the survival of Christian civilization."

If you are a Christian you, too, are in a battle; and there is a lot at stake. At stake in this battle is the joy of your heart, the happiness of your marriage, the welfare of your children, the security of your home, the influence of your life, the advancement of God's kingdom, and your eternal destiny.

You are in a war. It's a spiritual war and it's a zero-sum game. However, there is one major problem. Many Christians, perhaps most, are losing their war with the devil, day-by-day, because they're not even showing up for the battle. In fact, I believe there are a lot of Christians who do not even realize there's a war is going on.

General Douglas MacArthur once said, "In war there is no substitute for victory." I can assure you that statement is just as true for the spiritual battle we find ourselves engaged in. Spiritual warfare is real. It's a reality that Christians face every day of their lives as they seek to follow Christ. It's hard to truly comprehend a threat that comes from things unseen. However, let me assure you that you're in war and the battle ground lies in the realms of thoughts, attitudes, relationships, and spiritual forces at work in the world. Your battle is the spiritual warfare you are engaged in every day as you struggle against the forces of darkness, seeking to undermine our faith, distort truth, and hinder our spiritual growth.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must identify the battle and our adversary. Ephesians 6:12 states: "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 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Paul tells us that spiritual warfare and the nature of the battle that Christians face are not physical beings, but rather spiritual forces aligned against God and His people. These spiritual forces are described in terms of hierarchy and power, such as rulers, authorities, and powers of darkness.

What Paul is telling us is that we must identify who we are at war with if we are going to be successful in the daily battles we must face and fight. As God's people, our struggle is against spiritual forces that are opposed to God and seek to undermine His work in us and in the world. As Christians, you and I are called to not only be aware of the battle, but to engage in it through the truth of God's Word, prayer, spiritual disciplines, and a reliance on God's strength, power, and protection.

I've got some good news and bad news for you. The bad news is you cannot win the war in your own power. The good news is you don't have to. Because this war is not to be fought in your power. As a matter of fact, you cannot fight Satan in your own power, and that is part of the problem that many Christians have today. When we try and fight Satan ourselves, we do it in the power of the flesh. You can't fight Satan in the flesh if you want to win the battles you face. You can only win when you fight with the weapons of the Spirit.

Spiritual warfare is real, and we must be prepared for battle. Charles Spurgeon describes it this in way: "It is a real fight, not a sham or makebelieve. We are really and truly engaged in warfare against the devil and his forces."

Gird yourself and let's roll!!

SERMON NOTES:	

DAY 1 | WEEK 1 Identifying the Battlefield By: Dr. Jody Ray

"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." (Ephesians 6:10-12, NIV)

IDENTIFYING THE BATTLEFIELD DAY 1 | WEEK 1

My grandfather, Frank Ray, served in the Navy on the USS Solomon in World War II. The USS Solomon was an aircraft carrier that served in anti-submarine operations during the Battle of the Atlantic, as well as a number of transport missions. One of my grandfather's jobs on the USS Solomon was the role of an antiaircraft gunner. If you're familiar with the Navy, you probably recognize the command, "Battle Stations." Whenever a Navy gunner hears those words, he knows to get to his post, lock, and load, make sure the safety is off, and be ready to fight.

There was a time when you were at war with God. You were born at war with God because you were born in sin. But when you lay down your arms at the Cross of Jesus Christ in unconditional surrender, God declared peace with you. When God declared peace with you, Satan declared war on you. From that moment you are in a lifelong battle with "the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12, NIV) You're permanently at your battle station. Because of this fact, it is vitally important that you identify the enemy and know your weapons.

As we study Ephesians 6:11-12, Paul provides some profound insights into the nature of the battle that we are engaged in daily as we navigate the spiritual landscape of our faith.

Paul writes: "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."

These verses serve as a clarion call to every believer to recognize the true nature of the conflict and to prepare themselves accordingly for the spiritual warfare that lies ahead.

Again, you're engaged in spiritual warfare, and you face a very powerful army whose goal is to defeat and destroy you. They use spiritual strategies and tactics to turn you away from Jesus and back to sin. Although you are assured of victory, you must engage in the struggle until Christ returns, because Satan is constantly battling against all who are on the Lord's side.

Paul begins in Ephesians 6:10, by exhorting believers to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. This directive underscores the foundational truth that your strength and ability to withstand spiritual attacks do not come from your own efforts or abilities but from the infinite power of God Himself. When you acknowledge your dependence on the Lord's strength, you are better equipped to face the challenges that confront us in the spiritual realm.

Paul then introduces the metaphor of putting on the full armor of God. He uses this imagery to describe how you must be ready, prepared, and protected. Just as a soldier would arm themselves with physical armor before entering battle. Christians are called to arm themselves with spiritual armor to guard against the schemes of the devil. Each piece of the armor mentioned – such as the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Righteousness, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit – symbolize essential aspects of our spiritual walk and defense against spiritual attacks.

Paul further clarifies that the battle we face is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil. By identifying the true nature of the enemy - rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms – Paul reminds us that our ultimate struggle is against unseen, but very real spiritual adversaries. The spiritual adversaries are not human opponents, but rather the spiritual forces of darkness. This is why spiritual discernment, vigilance, and reliance on God's power navigate the challenges of the spiritual realm.

Ephesians 6:10-12 serve as a very poignant reminder to all followers of Jesus that we are in fact in a spiritual war. Because of this war there are battles that rage around us and in us every single day. We must identify the true nature of the battle and arm ourselves with the full armor of God so that we can stand firm in our faith, resist the schemes of the enemy, and emerge victorious through the power and strength of the Lord.

Let's heed the words of the Apostle Paul by recognizing the spiritual warfare and approach each battle with courage, faith, and a steadfast reliance on the Almighty God who equips us for victory in the spiritual realm.

Questions for further reflection:

1. What does Ephesians 6:10 mean by "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power?" How can we practically apply this to our daily lives?

2. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul mentions that "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." How can this understanding change the way we approach challenges and conflicts in our lives?

3. According to Ephesians 6:11, what is the significance of putting on the full armor of God? How does this armor help us in our spiritual battles?

DAY 2 | WEEK 1 Overcoming the Temptation to Conform Battle By: Dr. Jody Ray

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." (Daniel 1:8, NIV)

OVERCOMING THE TEMPTATION TO CONFORM BATTLE DAY 2 | WEEK 1

Daniel, like many other Hebrew boys, was carried away as a captive into the foreign country of Babylon. There the king chose the strongest and the most intelligent of his captives to be set apart for service in his court. This group was to receive three years of special training in the Babylonian language, learning, and wisdom. Daniel and three of his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were part of this select group. It was an honor and an opportunity.

The king provided them with the foods, wines, and delicacies of the royal table itself – foods and wines which, however, were forbidden by the laws of Moses, the laws of the Hebrews, and the Law of God. Most of these foods were unclean according to Jewish standards; many had undoubtedly been offered to idols in the pagan temples.

Daniel was in a tough spot. He appreciated the advantage of being in this privileged group, but realized at once that he would compromise his faith if he ate the food and drank the wine.

So, he made up his mind that he would not partake. The Bible says that he "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). Quietly and respectfully, he requested the officer in charge to provide meals containing simple, healthy, and nutritious food – vegetables and water. The official, who had been favorably impressed by these young Hebrews, was leery at first (fearful that this would hinder their progress), but eventually agreed to a testing period – and then to a permanent adjustment.

Why make such an issue over a matter so unimportant? Because for Daniel, it was not unimportant—it was serious.

It would have been natural, logical, and easy for Daniel to do what most of us would have done. We say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans." Daniel could have said. "When in Babylon, do as the Babylonians." Why not just go along with the crowd? After all, he was a slave in a foreign land. He had no real choice in the matter. Why not do as everybody else did? Why not? Who would know? What difference would it make? He was far from home. And the food was desirable—the rich delicacies of a wealthy court, appealing to the appetite.

Yet realizing all of this ... realizing that he would be subject to ridicule and mockery ... realizing that he was risking the anger of the king ... realizing that he was jeopardizing his whole future and possibly even his life ... still Daniel said, "I will be faithful to my God. I will not defile myself. I will abstain from food and wine which, for me, is forbidden" (Daniel 1:8).

One of the greatest battles we face is the temptation to conform to the ways of the world and compromise our faith in God. So, how do we fight the temptation to conform?

1. Know God's Word

Daniel's decision to not defile himself was rooted in his knowledge of God's laws and commandments. He knew what was pleasing to God and made a conscious choice to honor Him in all that he did. As believers, we too should immerse ourselves in God's Word and let it guide our decisions and actions, especially when faced with temptation.

2. Resolve to Honor God

Daniel "resolved not to defile himself." Despite being in a foreign land with pressure to conform to the way of the Babylonians, Daniel made a firm decision not to compromise his faith. As followers of Christ, we too must have strong resolve and commitment to honor God with our lives, especially in the face to temptation, if we are going to win the battle.

3. Seek God's Strength

Daniel did not rely on his own strength to overcome the temptation before him. Instead, he sought God's help and guidance through prayer. In verse 9, we see that God granted Daniel favor and compassion when he asked for help. "Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel..." (Daniel 1:9, NIV).

When we are faced with temptation, we should follow Daniel's example and seek God's strength through prayer.

4. Stand Firm in Faith

Daniel's unwavering commitment to God serves as an inspiration for us to stand firm in our faith, even when it is difficult. Amid a culture that may be hostile to our beliefs, we are called to remain steadfast and trust God's faithfulness to see us through.

As we reflect on Daniel's example, let us examine our own lives and consider how we respond to the temptations and pressures of the world around us. Are we willing to make tough choices to honor God, even when it may be unpopular or difficult? Let us remember that God is faithful to those who seek Him and that He will provide the strength and courage we need to overcome any temptation that comes our way.

The story of Daniel challenges us to be unwavering in our faith and commitment to God, even in the face of temptation. By following Daniel's example of knowledge of God's Word, resolve, reliance on God's strength, and standing firm in faith, we can overcome the temptation battle and live lives that bring glory and honor to God.

Questions for further reflection:

1. How can we cultivate a strong resolve like Daniel's to resist temptation and remain faithful to God in a world that often promotes values contrary to those found in Scripture?

2. In what ways can immersing ourselves in God's Word help us when facing temptations and pressures to conform to the ways of the world, just as it did for Daniel in his time?

3. Reflecting on Daniel's example of seeking God's strength through prayer, how can we develop a consistent prayer life that empowers us to overcome temptations and stand firm in our faith, even in challenging circumstances?

DAY 3 | WEEK 1 The Battlefield of the Heart By: Dr. Jody Ray

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE HEART DAY 3 | WEEK 1

The Bible tells us to be watchful and to guard our hearts against the iniquity of sin. Evil can only enter us when we allow it into our hearts. Think about it... no one wakes up in the morning thinking: "Today, I'm going to go there and blow up my life! I'm going to wreck my marriage, destroy my family, and completely blow up the business I've worked so hard to build." Nobody makes that decision and yet it happens every single day. How does it happen?

It happens when we don't guard our hearts. Many years ago, King Solomon said it best: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

We must guard our hearts for three primary reasons:

1. Your Heart is Valuable

We don't stand guard over worthless things. Think about it. Each week you take your trash to curb in the evening. It sits out there all night, unguarded, and you don't have to worry about it being stolen. Heck, you wouldn't care if someone stole it. Why? Because it's worthless! Your heart on the other hand is extremely valuable. It's valuable to you and it's valuable to Satan because of one main reason – your heart connects you to God and to other people. That's why King Solomon said, "Above all else... guard your heart." In other words, guarding your heart must be your number one priority.

2. Your Heart is the Source of Everything You do

King Solomon said it is the "wellspring of life." In biblical terms, the heart is not just a physical organ that pumps blood but refers to the innermost core of our being – the seat of our emotions, desires, beliefs, and intentions. It is from the heart that our words, actions, and decisions flow. Just as a wellspring is the source of water that nourishes and sustains life, our hearts are the source from which our lives flow.

If your heart is unhealthy, it will impact your whole life and spiritual health in negative ways. It threatens your family, your friends, and your career. Everything we do emanates from the state of our hearts. If our hearts are filled with love, compassion, wisdom, and faith, our actions will reflect these qualities. Conversely, a heart harboring bitterness, anger, selfishness, or impurity will produce actions that align with these negative characteristics.

3. Because Your Heart is Under Constant Attack

When King Solomon says to guard your heart, he is implying that you are living in a battle zone. In this battle zone there are casualties of war. Therefore, we must be vigilant and give careful attention to what we allow into our hearts – our thoughts, influences, relationships, and desires. Just as a wellspring must be protected from contamination to ensure the purity and quality of the water it produces: we must safeguard our hearts from negative influences that can corrupt our character and lead us astray.

Our spiritual adversary uses all kinds of weapons to attack our heart. Therefore, we must protect our heart above everything else. By guarding our hearts, cultivating a relationship with God, and allowing His truth to dwell within us. We can ensure that our lives reflect the beauty and goodness that flow from a heart aligned with God's purposes.

Questions for further reflection:

1. How can we practically guard our hearts in today's culture, where we are constantly bombarded with various influences through media, social interactions, and digital platforms that may impact the condition of our hearts?

2. What are some of the warning signs or indicators that our hearts may need guarding, and what steps can we take to address and protect our hearts from negative influences or attitudes that could lead us away from God's purposes?

3. In what ways can intentional practices such as prayer, meditation on Scripture, accountability with other believers, and regular worship help us in the ongoing process of guarding our hearts and ensuring they remain aligned with God's will and character?

DAY 4 | WEEK 1 Battling the Spiritual Forces of Evil By: Dr. Jody Ray

"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." (Ephesians 6:12, NIV)

BATTLING THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL DAY 4 | WEEK 1

General Douglas MacArthur once wrote an article entitled, "Requisites for Military Success," and he gave four principles that he believed were the most important to win a battle.

First, there must be morale. He said a fighting force must be united by an esprit de corps, a will to win as a sense of a cause worth dying for. Secondly, there must be strength. The soldiers must have adequate training and must be well equipped to do the job. Third, MacArthur said there must be an adequate source of supply. Lifelines must be kept open so that those at the front lines receive all that they need to win.

However, he said by far the most important principle is a knowledge of the enemy. MacArthur wrote, "The greater the knowledge of the enemy, the greater the potential of victory."

Many people don't believe there is in fact an enemy called the devil.

I'm reminded of the prize fighter whose opponent was beating him about half to death. Every time he would come back to sit on the stool between rounds, his manager would say, "Go get him tiger, he hasn't laid a hand on you!" Well, for seven rounds this guy was getting beat from pillar to post and every time his manager would say the same thing. Finally, with both eyes closed shut, bleeding from the nose and his lips cut wide open, when that manager said, "Go get him tiger, he hasn't laid a hand on you!" The fighter looked at the manager and said, "Then I want you to keep your eye on that referee because somebody is beating the daylights out of me!"

Don't be deceived. We have a spiritual enemy who seeks to destroy us daily. Therefore, we must understand four key concepts if we are going to effectively battle spiritual forces of evil.

1. Identify the Enemy

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. As believers, we are engaged in a spiritual battle that requires us to know our enemy and be prepared for battle.

Our true adversaries are not human beings but spiritual forces of evil. These forces seek to undermine our faith, sow discord, and hinder the work of God in our lives and in the world. Knowing our enemy is crucial in preparing for and engaging in spiritual warfare.

2. The Realm of the Battle

The battleground of this war is not physical but spiritual, taking place in the heavenly realms. This dimension of the battle reminds us that our weapons are spiritual in nature and that victory is ultimately secured through the power of God.

3. The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:12 describes the spiritual armor God provides for believers to stand firm in the face of spiritual attacks. This armor includes, the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Righteousness, the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Each piece of armor is essential for protection and defense in the spiritual battle.

4. Prayer and Vigilance

In Ephesians 6:18, Paul writes: "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 Lord's people."

Believers are urged to pray and be alert, persevering in prayer for all God's people. Prayer is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare, enabling us to seek God's strength, guidance, and protection during battle. Vigilance and perseverance in prayer are essential components of our spiritual defense. Battling the spiritual forces of evil is a reality for every believer, but we are not left defenseless. Through the armor of God, prayer, and vigilance, we can stand firm against the schemes of the enemy and experience victory in Christ. We must be diligent in equipping ourselves for spiritual warfare and rely on the power of God to overcome the forces of darkness as we walk in faith and obedience.

Questions for further reflection:

1. Reflect on your awareness of the spiritual battle described in Ephesians 6:12. In what ways have you experienced spiritual warfare in your own life or in the lives of others?

2. Consider the armor of God outlined in Ephesians 6:10-18. Which piece of spiritual armor do you feel most in need of in your current season of life, and how can you intentionally put it on daily?

3. How can you incorporate prayer and vigilance in your spiritual life to strengthen your defense against the spiritual forces of evil and to support fellow believers in their own battles?

DAY 5 | WEEK 1 Be Strong in the Lord By: Dr. Jody Ray

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." (Ephesians 6:10, NIV)

BE STRONG IN THE LORD DAY 5 | WEEK 1

Ephesians 6:10 is a powerful verse that reminds us of the source of our strength as believers – the Lord. But what exactly does it mean to be strong in the Lord?

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

David understood the key spiritual truth that we must also understand if we are going to win our daily battles against our spiritual adversary.

David knew that his source of strength was the Lord. Relying on God's strength rather than your own strength is important for several reasons:

1. God's Strength is Limitless

David knew that God's strength was limitless and would give him the victory over the giant Goliath. Therefore, he moved forward in confidence to face him. Our human strength is finite and limited, but God's strength knows no bounds. When you rely on your own strength, you will quickly become overwhelmed and tired. However, God's strength is inexhaustible, and He can empower you to overcome any obstacle or challenge.

2. God's Strength is Perfect

God's strength is perfect and unfailing. God's perfect strength empowered David with unwavering courage and led him to victory. David's trust in God's strength enabled him to face the giant that stood before him with confidence. Our own strength is prone to weaknesses, doubts, and fluctuations. By relying on God's strength, you can tap into His perfect power that never fails us, even in the most difficult circumstances.

3. God's Strength Provides Peace In the moment in which David faced Goliath, he was at peace because he knew that God was his protector and defender. In times of danger, he trusted God's strength to deliver him from his adversaries, which gave him a sense of security and peace of mind. When you try to carry the burdens of life on your own, you will begin to feel anxious, stressed, and burdened. Relying on God's strength will allow you to experience peace and rest, knowing that He is in control and will sustain you through every trial.

4. God's Strength Transforms You

When David faced Goliath, his trust in God's strength, gave him the courage to confront and defeat the seemingly insurmountable foe. This victory not only demonstrated David's bravery but also increased his confidence in God's ability to help him overcome challenges. When you rely on God's strength, it not only helps you overcome challenges, but also transforms you from the inside out. As you trust in Him and surrender to His power, you grow in faith, character, and dependence on Him.

5. God's Strength Aligns Us with His Will

When you rely on your own strength, you may be guided by your own desires, ambitions, or fears. However, when you rely on God's strength, you align your life with His will which leads to walking in the fullness of His purpose for you. David relied on God's strength to defeat Goliath and that moment ultimately led to God's purpose in David's life. David's victory over the giant Goliath, with only a sling and a stone, showed God's favor in his life which marked him as a hero and leader in Israel.

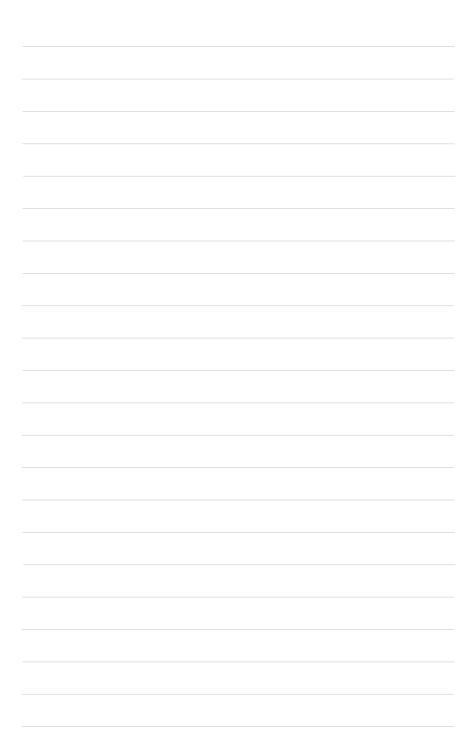
Questions for further reflection:

1. How does the command to "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" challenge our tendency to rely on our own strength and abilities in daily life? How can we cultivate a mindset of dependence on God's strength rather than our own?

2. In what areas of your life do you struggle the most to rely on God's strength instead of your own? What practical steps can you take to surrender those areas to God and trust in His power to sustain you?

3. Reflecting on Ephesians 6:10, how does the knowledge of God's "mighty power" impact your approach to facing challenges, obstacles, and spiritual battles in your life? How can a deep understanding of God's strength influence your perspective and response to difficult circumstances?

Additional Notes:



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OUR MISSION

To lead people to trade the pursuit of more for a life worth pursuing in Jesus Christ.



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