

- Move toward practical discipleship: **What does putting this on actually look like this week?**
- Leave significant room for **altar ministry, prayer, repentance, surrender, healing, and spiritual response.**

Suggested Altar Response

Create space for **confession and repentance.**

Ask: **Where have I allowed compromise into my life?**

Not condemnation. Not shame. An invitation to step into the light, receive God's grace, and surrender areas that aren't aligned with His righteousness.

I. ATTENTION GETTER

One of the most striking stories of costly conviction in the last century belongs to a man named Óscar Romero.

Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, in the middle of a brutal civil war. The powerful people in his country were actually relieved when he got the job because he was known to be quiet, cautious, and safe. Not a man who made waves.

But three weeks into his appointment, that changed.

A close friend of his — a priest named Rutilio Grande, who spent his life among the poor — was murdered by a death squad for speaking up for the poor. As Archbishop Romero stood over his friend's body, something in him broke.

Reflecting on that moment, he concluded and I quote— "If they killed him for what he did, then I must follow the same path."

Shortly after, Romero used his Sunday sermons — broadcast across the entire country — to name the disappeared, the tortured, the murdered. Every week. Friends begged him to stop, to protect himself. Other priests were being killed. He kept going.

The night before he died, he looked straight into a camera and pleaded with soldiers to stop the killing. The next evening, as he led a service, a single bullet went through his heart.

Here's what gets me - this is what biographers noted. This type of courage to keep going didn't come naturally to Romero. What changed in him wasn't merely personality. God stepped into the grief of losing his friend — and carried him further than his own nature ever could.

Romero didn't produce that kind of courage to do the right thing on his own. **[PAUSE]**

That courage was produced by righteousness. And righteousness — this right standing before God — isn't earned. It's given. And I'm telling you... it is that righteousness that helps us live in a way that we couldn't live on our own.

I don't know about you, but I know that feeling — standing next to a version of myself I know I could be or should be, and knowing I do not have it in me to get there on my own.

I know I should be a more patient dad with my little angels... and yet I rush and I snap.

I know I could be more open about my own struggles... and yet it's so much easier to keep conversations superficial.

I know I could be more generous... and yet I keep thinking I have to protect what was always a gift in the first place.

If you're like me — if you relate to that sense of knowing what you could be, and not having it in you to get there on your own — I've got some good news for you.

The answer is not to try harder. Be better. Produce it.

The answer, Scripture tells us, is this: we were never meant to produce righteousness. We were meant to put on a righteousness that's **already** been given to us in Christ Jesus.

That righteousness He gives us sustains us and carries us further than we ever could on our own. That is our **Big Idea for tonight**: We stand secure because Christ gives us His righteousness — and shapes us to live righteously.

II. BRIDGE AND SCRIPTURE

Turn with me to Ephesians 6, beginning with verse 10. After giving household instructions...the Lord, through Paul, gives all believers this command:

¹⁰ 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. - Ephesians 6:10-17

Pray with me.

If you have read Ephesians or been with us the last few weeks, you know that chapters 1 to 3 are indicative of who God is, of what He has done, and who we are now that we are in Christ. Some of the things Paul says we are:

- Sealed with the Spirit (1:13)
- Blessed with every spiritual blessing
- Made alive together with Christ (2:5)
- Built into a temple (2:21)

And then chapter 4 changes direction - it goes from "this is who you are" to "Now this is how you walk... this is how you live in unity, in purity, in the household, in the church — and in chapter 6, he zooms out and says, in effect, **none of this happens in neutral territory**. There is "rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world" and "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (6:12) actively opposing the way we live.

The armor then is not a separate topic added to the way we should live. No, putting on the armor is how we live the Christian life - because we understand that every act of love, unity, of purity, and forgiveness happens in the context of an enemy, this broken world, and our own flesh. To not put the armor then is to go exposed into battle.

Last week, Pastor Joel showed us that putting the armor on starts with the belt of truth. What God says is what holds everything together.

And tonight, we look at the next piece of the armor — the breastplate of righteousness.

Before we go further, let's make sure we're standing on the same definition. The word Paul uses — **righteousness** — carries a double meaning worth knowing. It means **right standing**: a legal reality, a verdict already declared over you. But it also means **right living**: a life that actually matches that verdict.

So, Paul names the breastplate of righteousness as our first covering, and out of all the places God could've covered first, He covers the heart. Why the heart? Solomon tells us why, centuries before Paul ever picked up a pen: **"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"** (Proverbs 4:23). Not guard your reputation or your image. Guard your heart — because everything else, every decision, every action, every word, flows out from there. Because the heart is the seat of your will, your loyalty, your desire — it's your vital center. Much like a physical arrow through the chest is fatal, an unguarded heart is exactly where the enemy aims his lies and accusations.

So God covers the heart with righteousness. But not a breastplate of righteousness of our own making, this is the first truth we must remind ourselves time and time again, that...

III. **EXEGESIS**

1. **We cannot manufacture our own righteousness.**

Now the phrase "Breastplate of righteousness" was first used by Isaiah some 600 years earlier. Isaiah 59 describes Israel in total moral collapse — and verse 16 says God "saw that there was no man" — no one able to produce the righteousness the moment required. So what does God do? Verse 17: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate."

God arms himself, because no human being could. Not the most disciplined. Not the most devoted. Not the one who's tried the longest and hardest to be good enough. Not Moses, who saw God face to face. Not David, "a man after God's own heart." Not Paul himself, a Pharisee

among Pharisees. If righteousness could be produced by effort, someone, somewhere, would have produced enough of it by now. But no one has.

Now, if I'm honest, for most of us... we already know this. You've tried doing this in our power and seen where that leads. So... I don't want to spend too much time convincing you that you cannot manufacture your own righteousness. I want to tell you the ways in which we try to do it anyway.

Sometimes it looks like **paying it off**. You snap at your spouse, or you give in to something you swore you were done with — and instead of going straight to confession, you do something to make up for it. You show up early to serve. You give a little extra that week — that one, we don't mind. You sit in the first row. You are the most attentive person in your small group. Here's the tell: notice *when* the weight lifts. If it lifts after the effort — not after the confession — you weren't repenting. You were paying off a debt Jesus already paid. You're trusting the deed, not the One who already paid it.

Sometimes it looks like **comparison**. Not measuring yourself against Christ's righteousness — measuring yourself against somebody else's mess. *At least I'm not doing what they're doing. At least I'm better than I used to be.* It feels like humility. It's not. It's grading on a curve when Jesus has already given us the victory.

Sometimes it looks like **the ledger**. A quiet daily accounting: *I read my Bible today. I didn't lose my temper with the kids. I was patient in that meeting I wanted to walk out of.* And by the end of the day, you've decided — based on that ledger — whether you're in a good place with God tonight. That's not gratitude for grace. That's spiritual bookkeeping. And here's the mistake in it: even on your worst day, God's grace is available to you.

Sometimes it looks like **punishing yourself**. You replay the failure for days. You withhold joy from yourself as if staying miserable a little longer will even things out. It feels like conviction — it can even feel spiritual — but it's still an attempt to pay for something that's already paid for. Give it to Jesus.

And sometimes it looks like **letting what you do stand in for who you are**. This one's dangerous precisely because it's dressed up as faithfulness. You lead the small group. You're discipling someone. You're the one people come to for prayer. And somewhere in there — quietly, without ever saying it out loud — your ministry stops being the *fruit* of being loved by God and starts becoming the *evidence* you present to feel secure that you are. I'll be honest with you — this is the one I struggle with. I have to rest in God first, so I can remember I'm His son before I'm anything else.

And that's true for all of us, not just me.

Carry Line: Family — whatever righteousness we produce cannot protect us, because our own goodness will always fall short.

Application: This week: Notice which one of these you default to. The next time you catch yourself paying it off, comparing, keeping the ledger, punishing yourself, or hiding behind ministry — stop, and bring it to confession instead of managing it on your own.

Transition: And when you do... when you bring your shortcomings before God, know that...

2. Christ gives us His righteousness.

This is the truth that makes the good news of the Gospel effective everyday.

Can I give you a picture of the gospel? Is that okay?

Jesus tells this story in Luke 15. A father has two sons. The younger one says, in effect, *I wish you were dead — give me my inheritance now*. And the father does. The son takes it, leaves, and burns through everything. When the money's gone, so are his friends. He ends up feeding pigs — starving enough to envy what they're eating.

That's where he comes to his senses. He rehearses a speech on the walk home. He's not hoping for a welcome. He's hoping for a demotion — to be treated as a hired servant instead of a son.

But verse 20: *"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."*

A man of that father's standing did not run. Running meant shame, exposed legs, undignified. He didn't care. He'd clearly been watching that road for a long time.

The son starts his speech. He barely finishes it. The father cuts him off — not to punish him, but to dress him.

"Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."

The robe — his own, likely — covers the son's shame. The ring puts the father's authority behind his name. The shoes — slaves went barefoot in that house; sons didn't. Every piece, at the father's expense. He doesn't earn one thread of it. He's clothed before he finishes his sentence.

That's the armor. The breastplate of righteousness isn't assembled by us, piece by piece. It's the robe the Father runs to put on us before we're done apologizing. His perfection. His standing. Given, at His expense — not ours.

But there's a second son.

While the party's going, the older brother is still out working, like always. He hears the music, asks what's happening, finds out his brother's home — and refuses to go in.

Verse 29: *"These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat."*

That's not "I don't deserve this." That's a resume. Years of service. Perfect obedience. He's not asking for mercy — he's demanding payment.

Two sons, two roads, same problem. One tried to secure his life by leaving the father. One tried to secure his life by working for the father. Neither one was standing on the ground the father was actually offering.

The father goes out to the older son too: *"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours."* Not earned. Given.

Family — our standing before God rests on what Jesus has done, not on our spiritual performance.

If you're the younger son tonight — already rehearsing your apology, already bracing to be treated like a hired servant — hear this: there is no condemnation waiting for you at that door. Only a robe. The Father is already running. That's protection from condemnation.

If you're the older son tonight — obedience quietly turned into a resume — hear it as your own: *all that is mine is yours*. That's protection from pride, and pride is one of the most deadly weapons from the enemy.

One robe. Offered freely to both sons — because both were about to face life in armor they built themselves. Neither would have survived on it.

Six hundred years before Christ walked out of a tomb, the prophet Isaiah pictured this exact moment — a people clothed not in what they made, but in what they were given: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness," (Isaiah 61:10). Not a robe we wove. A robe we were covered with.

Carry line: We do not fight **for** our standing with God. We fight **from** it.

Application: This week, Practice receiving instead of earning. When shame tells you to hide or pride tells you to present your resume — would you stop and thank God for the righteousness that is now yours? Would you remind yourself...

Transition: We fight from what the righteousness given to us. We put on that righteousness Jesus gives us, and that righteousness shapes the way we live.

3. Righteousness shapes the way we live.

Paul writes about this exact thing to a young pastor named Titus. Titus 2:11–12: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."*

Notice — the grace of God appears, and it doesn't just save us and step back.

Grace doesn't simply change our standing. It changes our living.

Grace doesn't just save — it trains.

Solomon says something that ties directly into this breastplate: *"Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner"* (Proverbs 13:6). Notice the verb — *righteousness guards*. It's not a decoration you wear once you've already arrived. It's active protection, still doing its work, every single day you walk in it.

But notice what the verse doesn't say. It doesn't say wickedness ambushes the righteous. It says wickedness overthrows the sinner. The Hebrew word there — *salaph* — doesn't picture a sudden siege or a violent coup. It pictures something being slowly twisted crooked, a little at a time, until it's unrecognizable. Not toppled in one blow. For most of us, it's not that we wake up one day and choose wickedness outright. We drift. We neglect. We simply stop choosing right living, one small day at a time — and that neglect is exactly what wickedness uses to do its twisting.

That's why God calls us, by grace, to actually put this breastplate on for battle — to keep it fastened over the heart it exists to guard. We have a real enemy, one who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking an opening (1 Peter 5:8). And if we don't fasten it, understand — there's no neutral territory. We put on the alternative: unrighteousness. We become more vulnerable to the enemy's attack, more led by our flesh, more prone to conform to the patterns of this world.

There's a word for what that drift becomes. I want you to remember it: **compromise**.

What is compromise? I love how spy movies often use it. A compromised agent isn't the one who quit. It's the one still wearing the badge while quietly working for the other side. Double-dipping. Loyal enough to stay in the room, but not loyal enough to stop selling secrets.

That's exactly what it looks like to love God and still satisfy the flesh.

James has a word for this: double-minded — unstable in all they do (James 1:8). Why? Because when you're unstable, you can try to put the armor on, but you're going to leave the gaps, and those gaps will leave you vulnerable!

Maybe your gap is what's still open on your phone at midnight — quiet, nobody watching. Maybe it's the conversation you keep having in your head with someone you haven't actually forgiven. Maybe it's the gap between how put-together you seem at church, and how you're actually doing.

Beloved of God, God has given us grace by giving us the breastplate of righteousness. He wants you to wear it fully — fastened, not half-on. So I plead with you: will you repent of the compromise?

Listen — Jesus really does call us to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. But that was never a call to manufacture your own perfection. It's a call to walk in His. Perfectionism — the belief that you have to earn your own flawlessness — that's a lie from the enemy. Jesus already is your perfection. What I am saying is this: you must first rely on the righteousness that Jesus has given you.

And then put on the armor He has given you. And by the grace that is abundant, ask Him to help you walk in right living each day of your life.

And on the days you compromise — because there will likely be days— choose righteousness. Choose repentance. Choose the loving arms of the Father who is already running towards you.

IV. ILLUSTRATION

I want to tell you something from my own life. Our Pastors team is committed to preaching in a way that helps you know us through what we preach.

I was ten, maybe eleven. My younger brother — sixteen months younger than me — got hurt one afternoon, doing something he shouldn't have been doing. Being mischievous, like younger brothers are.

My dad came home, found out what happened, and came straight to my room. And he yelled at me. Because in his mind, I was the older brother — I should have been watching out for him, protecting him. And I hadn't.

I remember exactly how that felt. Not just in trouble — *disqualified*. Like I'd failed at the one job that mattered.

But a little while later, my dad came back.

And this time, he wasn't yelling. He sat down, and he started to cry, and he told me he was sorry. It was the first time in my life I'd ever seen my father cry — and it was to ask his ten-year-old son for forgiveness.

Here's what I didn't understand until much later. What changed in me after that wasn't that I became afraid of getting it wrong again. It was the opposite. I gained a strange kind of confidence — not confidence that I wouldn't mess up, but confidence that whether my dad got it right or wrong in the moment, he was capable of coming back and making it right. I didn't need to be perfect around him anymore. I just needed to know he'd still come find me.

Family, that's the difference. We don't pursue holiness to make God accept us. We pursue holiness because in Christ, He already has.

My father, imperfect as he was, still came back — before I fixed anything, before I proved anything. And if an imperfect father could love me enough to run into my room and weep over what he'd gotten wrong...

...how much more does your perfect Father run toward you? How much more is He eager to see you finally put on the righteousness He's already given you?

Whatever gap you're carrying tonight — whatever compromise, whatever shame — He's not waiting behind a door for you to fix it first. He's already on His way to the room you're standing in. Tonight, He wants to pour out His grace on you.

Now, grace isn't received by hiding — it's received through confession and repentance.

So I want to ask you something, and I want you to actually answer it, not just hear it: *Where have I allowed compromise in my life?*