

LEADER GUIDE

SESSION 6

We Stand Together in Spiritual Battle

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: When have you been surprised by something totally unexpected?

RECAP (PAGE 103): A friend of mine recently prepared his house for sale. He cleaned, painted, and staged it. Pride of ownership was gleaming in every room. Buyers flooded the home and boasted of its beauty. Everything was going great until the home inspection revealed a significant problem: an army of termites was damaging the structural integrity of the floor. No amount of paint and redecorating could erase the unseen threat hidden deep beneath the visible surface. My friends eventually did sell their house, but they learned a valuable lesson: Things aren't always what they seem on the outside.

Spiritually, things might look OK to the outside world, but below the surface a war rages. No one is immune to this conflict. It's not a physical war; it's a spiritual battle. Christians might not always think in those terms, but the battle is still there. Only by realizing we're in this fight can we stand against Satan and his wiles. Thankfully, God doesn't send His children into battle ill-equipped. He provides a spiritual armor by which we can engage the enemy and stand strong.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Bring several cardboard boxes and rolls of tape to your gathering. Divide the group into smaller subgroups of two to five people each, and give each subgroup a couple of boxes and tape. Challenge each subgroup to use the cardboard to create as many pieces of "armor" as they can in five minutes, and to "equip" one of their members with that armor. Invite subgroups to tell about the armor they created. Emphasize that today's session focuses on the armor God provides for us as we face our daily battles.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 104. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: We stand **STRONG** with God's **ARMOR** and the support of others.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Paul knew a lot about Roman soldiers and their equipment. He wrote Ephesians while in prison (3:1; 4:1) and in chains (6:20). After being arrested in Jerusalem, he spent two years in prison in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) and another two years imprisoned in the city of Rome (28:30), guarded by a Roman soldier (v. 16). Some scholars believe Paul was chained to the soldier. When Paul wrote about armor and soldiers, he had firsthand experience!

RECAP (PAGE 104): A lot of people, both inside and outside the church, view the Christian life as an effort to be better people, help others, and be good neighbors. But Jesus didn't save us to make us *better* people; He saved us to make us *new* people. Jesus wants to radically transform everything in our lives. The life Jesus has called us to live isn't a leisurely stroll down the religious boardwalk. The Christian life is a spiritual battle; it's open warfare for our allegiance.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 6:10-13 on page 104.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 104: **We are in a spiritual BATTLE.**

RECAP (PAGE 104): Paul's description of the Christian life couldn't have been any clearer! Look at the imagery he used: armor, a stand against the devil, the struggle with spiritual forces of evil, and a call to resist and be prepared. Paul described warfare, plain and simple.

In this battle, we fight against a shrewd enemy—the devil. The “schemes of the devil” (v. 11) describe his tactics of craftiness and deception. Satan is cunning in the way he deals with God's children. He knows how to spin things to his advantage and our demise, and he does it subtly—behind the scenes—primarily by twisting God's truth. He tries to convince us that God's way isn't best. His goal is for us to conform to the ways of the world rather than submit to Christ and allow Him to conform us into the character and plan of God.

DISCUSS: What have you been taught about spiritual warfare? [*ALTERNATE: What have you learned about the devil's schemes?*]

DISCUSS: What can we learn from these verses about our role in spiritual battles?

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 6:14-17 on page 104.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 105: **God EQUIPS us and PROTECTS us completely.**

RECAP (PAGE 105): Spiritual warfare certainly warrants an appropriate level of seriousness, but Christ-followers have no reason to be afraid. God hasn't deployed us into battle wearing flip-flops and holding a broomstick.

- ▶ Since our battle with the enemy isn't a physical struggle, no physical weapon will do. Spiritual battles require spiritual resources. Not just any spiritual resource will do either. We need God's resources for the battle at hand.
- ▶ As Christians, we can know and be confident that our God abundantly supplies spiritual resources. He promises to supply everything we need to fight the wiles of the enemy. And He promises to protect us from spiritual harm until we see Him face-to-face.

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **Ready for Battle**, on page 105, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

Ready for Battle: In the space below, draw a picture of yourself armed with God’s armor as listed in Ephesians 6:14-17. Underline the areas where you feel strong in the armor of God, and circle the areas that still need growth.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #12**, the “Armor of God” poster. Use this visual to help your group members understand the pieces of armor God equips us with.

DISCUSS: What are some real-life situations in which this armor is essential for Christ-followers? *[ALTERNATE: How do each of these pieces of armor help us face spiritual battles?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 6:18-20 on page 105.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 105: **We are to PRAY for one another as we stand in battle.**



RECAP (PAGE 105): Since the Christian life is a spiritual battle for our allegiance, then the gravity of that truth compels us to stand with one another through prayer. Praying for one another is our greatest weapon in spiritual warfare. Prayer is about so much more than asking God to meet tangible needs for us. In addition to praying for physical provision, Christ-followers should also pray for spiritual needs in one another’s lives.

DISCUSS: How does prayer contribute to our efforts in spiritual warfare? *[ALTERNATE: When have you seen prayer at work in spiritual battles?]*

LIVE IT OUT

SAY: “What will you do to stand with the body of Christ in the face of spiritual battles? Consider the following ideas.”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 106. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer lives this week.

- ▶ **Take your stand.** Through prayer, commit yourself anew to standing firm in the strength of the Lord in spiritual battle.
- ▶ **Stand with your church.** Take spiritual ownership of your church by praying regularly for your pastor(s), teacher(s), and fellow church members. Begin a prayer journal as a guide to help you pray.
- ▶ **Stand with the nations.** Research the global church including missionary needs, unreached people groups, and persecution. Check out the following websites for information and specific prayer requests: imb.org, joshuaproject.net, and operationworld.org.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 106) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 107–110).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 10]: Paul’s final major topic was a discussion of the spiritual battle believers fight. We need to know about spiritual warfare and how God protects us. We can’t fight on our own strength and resources; we must be “strengthened by the Lord.” Although Paul was imprisoned at the time, he didn’t lose confidence in God’s power. As Paul noted in Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who is against us?”

[VERSES 11-12]: Paul illustrated the way God would strengthen and defend His people with imagery of a soldier’s armor. Paul emphasized we need to put on the armor God has provided for us, a word picture similar to putting on our “new self” (Ephesians 4:24). It will do us no good unless we use it! God’s people need to “stand against the schemes of the devil.” The connotation is a strong resistance to the enemy, the devil. Paul elaborated: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” Readers might have had firsthand knowledge of military, soldiers, and war. Christians, however, face supernatural spiritual forces, identified as “rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”

[VERSE 13]: We should take advantage of God’s assistance by taking up the full armor of God. We won’t be able to resist the devil without it. Paul noted that Christians face an “evil day.” Paul might have anticipated persecution or tribulations at the end of time. In Ephesians 5:16 he mentioned that “the days are evil.” Paul didn’t detail how we would be attacked by these evil spiritual forces. God has provided the equipment we need for battle!

[VERSES 14-15]: Paul began itemizing parts of the protective armor of God, starting with “truth like a belt around your waist.” In the ancient world the belt secured the soldier’s clothing. Paul next mentioned the “armor on your chest” or breastplate. Often Paul used “righteousness” to point to God’s righteous and just character. Some scholars believe Paul might have referred to a Christian’s concern for righteousness and justice in human society. A Roman soldier wore sandals on his feet. Paul said these sandals represented “readiness for the gospel of peace.”

[VERSE 16]: Next was the shield. Roman soldiers typically carried a wood shield with a leather covering, around four feet tall and more than two feet wide. The leather covering protected the soldier from the flaming arrows shot by the enemy. Paul compared the

shield to faith, our trust in God. The “flaming arrows” were shot at Christians by “the evil one.” Generally, the “evil one” refers to Satan.

[VERSE 17]: Paul mentioned two more pieces of armor. First, he dealt with the helmet, which represents our salvation. Isaiah had also used this analogy in Isaiah 59:17. A helmet protected the soldier’s head from attack, much as a hard hat protects a construction worker and a helmet protects various athletes today. Paul compared the soldier’s sword to the Word of God. He reminded us that he was developing a word picture by calling the weapon the sword of the Spirit. “Word of God” in this context was the gospel message proclaimed by early Christians. The New Testament hadn’t been completed when Paul wrote this letter. For us, both the written Word of God and the proclaimed word of God can help us deal with the forces of evil.

[VERSE 18]: Paul turned to the topic of prayer. Prayer isn’t identified explicitly as a piece of armor in Paul’s analogy, but clearly he saw Christian prayer as an important resource in life’s struggles. Paul urged us to pray “in the Spirit” and “at all times.”

[VERSE 19]: Paul asked his readers to pray for him as well. Although in jail when he wrote this letter, Paul didn’t explicitly ask for liberation. He wanted to continue his ministry while he was in jail, and he wanted to proclaim the message in a bold way. Paul’s message focused on the “mystery of the gospel.” Generally, a mystery was a spiritual truth initially hidden from humans. Now, however, God had revealed the mystery. From Colossians 1:25-27 the content of the mystery was that Gentiles and Jews alike could be saved.

[VERSE 20]: Paul described himself as “an ambassador in chains.” He was literally in chains at times during his imprisonments. Paul referred to his chains when he defended himself before Agrippa (Acts 26:29). An “ambassador” was an official representative of a government. The ambassador would carry official messages to other rulers. Paul had described himself and other Christians as ambassadors in 2 Corinthians 5:20: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.” Paul asked again that his readers pray for him. His specific prayer request was that he “might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.” Paul did remain bold in his ministry during his imprisonment.



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

COMING NEXT QUARTER

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Session 1	Place God First (Exodus 20:1-6; Psalm 16:1-4a,9-11)
Session 2	Honor God (Exodus 20:7-11; Psalm 145:1-7)
Session 3	Honor Parents (Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 15:7-14)
Session 4	Honor Life (Exodus 20:13; 1 Samuel 26:7-11,22-25)
Session 5	Honor Marriage (Exodus 20:14; 2 Samuel 11:1-5)
Session 6	Honor All Relationships (Exodus 20:15-17; Psalm 37:1-6)

ALL IN: A LIFE OF COMMITMENT

Session 1	Christ's Commitment to Us (Romans 5:6-12,18-21)
Session 2	Our Commitment to Christ (Mark 10:13-22)
Session 3	Committed to His Word (Psalm 119:1-11)
Session 4	Committed to His Church (Romans 12:3-16)
Session 5	Committed to Pray (Colossians 1:3-12)
Session 6	Committed to His Worship (Psalm 99:1-9)
Session 7	Committed to His Mission (Romans 10:9-17)

ENDNOTES

1. John Huss, as quoted in R.C.H. Lenski, *The Eisenach Epistle Selections: Made Ready for Pulpit Work* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1914), 535.
2. Charlotte Wood, "Just As I Am," *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 307.
3. Don J. Kenyon, *He That Will Love Life: A Daily Reading Commentary on the First Epistle of Peter* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1968), 102.
4. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament, Volume 2* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton Books, 1989), Wordsearch ed.
5. Joni Eareckson Tada, "A Deeper Healing." *Grace to You*. Available online at www.gty.org.
6. *Ibid.*, Kenyon, 270.
7. Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Dictionary New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 933–934.
8. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 136–137.
9. 2019 World Watch List reporting period, November 1, 2017–October 31, 2018. Available online at www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution.
10. Anthony Steele, "How to Pray for the Persecuted Church," *Reaching and Teaching*, January 22, 2018, Available online at www.reachingandteaching.org.
11. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, Chapter 9.
12. Christina Gough, "Running & Jogging—Statistic and Facts," *Statista*, October 18, 2018. Available online at www.statista.com/topics/1743/running-and-jogging.
13. Alden Whitman, "Edward Steichen Is Dead at 93; Made Photography an Art Form," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1973. Available online at www.nytimes.com.
14. Larry Crabb and Dan B. Allender, *Encouragement: The Unexpected Power of Building Others Up* (Zondervan, 2013), Ch. 2.

The Pathway of Discipleship

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight markers consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Each year, Bible Studies for Life engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

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8 MARKERS	FALL 2019	WINTER 2019-20	SPRING 2020	SUMMER 2020
OBEY GOD AND DENY SELF	Simplicity: Finding Contentment in a Busy Life			
SEEK GOD	How to Know God’s Will			
SHARE CHRIST		Answers to Tough Questions: Defending What You Believe		
EXERCISE FAITH		When Life Gets Hard: Big Questions About Pain and Suffering		
ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE			Holy Vocabulary: Unpacking the Language of Faith	
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS			Dealing with Messy Relationships	
LIVE UNASHAMED				Living with Hope in a Broken World
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS				Why Do I Need the Church?