

THE SPOILS OF WAR

CLAIMING WHAT
CHRIST HAS ALREADY WON



PAUL JOSEPH

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“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:10–11)

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Before We Begin

There are two easy ways to get spiritual warfare wrong, and most of us have tried at least one of them. The first is to see a demon behind every flat tire, every headache and every grumpy neighbor. People who live that way are exhausting to be around, and frankly they give the devil far more credit than he deserves. The second is to quietly decide that the devil is a cartoon character with horns and a pitchfork, a handy symbol for bad things in general, but not a real enemy at all. People who live that way are very comfortable, right up until the day they discover that a real enemy has been quietly robbing them blind.

Many believers swing between those two ditches. They are a little afraid of the whole subject, and because they are afraid of it, they find it easier to ignore it. But the Bible walks a straight road between fascination and denial. It never tells us to be obsessed with Satan, but it does tell us to be awake. **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."** (1 Peter 5:8) Sober means clear-headed, not jumpy. Vigilant means alert, not anxious. That is the posture of this whole book: clear-headed, alert, and deeply confident.

The War Is Real

Let me say it plainly at the start: there is a war going on, and you are in it. Paul did not write to the Ephesians about a hobby for a few unusually intense Christians. He wrote, **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

(Ephesians 6:12) That means the conflict is real, it is organized, and it is ongoing, but it is fought in the spirit.

This needs to be settled early, because if we misunderstand the nature of the war, we will misunderstand the nature of the weapons. Spiritual warfare is not shouting without truth. It is not emotion without authority. It is not superstition, and it is not blaming demons for everything while we neglect obedience, discipline and the Word of God. Nor is it a side subject. It is the normal environment of Christian life in a fallen world. Every believer is involved, whether he signed up for it or not.

But the War Is Already Won

Now here is the part that makes me want to stand up and shout. My goal in these pages is not to make you nervous. It is to make you confident. The great foundation of all spiritual warfare is not the power of the enemy. It is the finished victory of Jesus Christ.

"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

(Colossians 2:15) Through His death, His blood and His resurrection, Jesus broke the enemy's claim, transferred us out of the kingdom of darkness, and handed His people the authority to stand, resist, pray, preach, praise, testify and advance in His name.

After the Second World War ended, a Japanese officer named Hiroo Onoda kept fighting in the jungles of the Philippines for twenty-nine more years. Nobody had convinced him the war was over. He was loyal, disciplined and brave, and he was fighting a war that had already been decided. In a strange way, that is a picture of two groups of people. It is a picture of the devil, who is still sniping from the jungle in a war he has already lost. And sadly, it is a picture of many Christians, who are still living as though the outcome were in doubt, because nobody has convinced them that the war has been won.

So let me be the one to bring you the news. **"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."** (1 John 4:4)

Notice the tense: have overcome. It is already done.

For Victory or From Victory?

If you remember only one line from this book, let it be this one: we do not fight for victory; we fight from victory. That one little word changes everything. A person fighting for victory is anxious, because the result depends on him. A person fighting from victory is steady, because the result has already been announced. He is not trying to create a victory that does not exist. He is enforcing, displaying and standing in the victory that Jesus already won.

Think of a family that legally owns a house, only to find squatters living in it. They do not buy the house a second time. They do not plead with the squatters to be nice. They pick up the deed, call the authorities, and insist that the law be enforced. That is spiritual warfare done the Bible way. The deed is the cross. The authority is the name of Jesus. Our job is enforcement.

That truth changes how we pray when answers seem delayed. It changes how we respond when fear attacks the mind. It changes how we handle accusation, heaviness, temptation and pressure. It turns fearful survivors into steady believers who know the authority of the One they represent. Most people approach this subject with a defensive, survival mindset, just hoping to make it through the week. This book is written as a manual for occupation. The enemy's main strategy is to deactivate believers, to switch off their effectiveness through deception, and the cure for that is light. As Paul said, we are not to let Satan take advantage of us, **"for we are not ignorant of his devices."**

(2 Corinthians 2:11)

How to Read This Book

The book is laid out in five parts, and each one builds on the last.

Part One, *The War Is Real, and It Is Already Won*, lays the foundation. We will look honestly at the war we are in and at the organized kingdom we face, and then we will lift our eyes to what the cross actually won, who you are in Christ, the name of Jesus, and the blood that gives every claim its legal ground.

Part Two, *The Whole Armor of God*, walks piece by piece through Ephesians 6, from the battleground of the mind to the belt of truth, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet, the sword, and the prayer that holds it all together.

Part Three, *The Weapons of Our Warfare*, puts those weapons in your hand: persistent prayer, standing through the pushback, fasting, the words of your mouth, praise, preaching, testimony, and setting captives free.

Part Four, *The Soldier Under Orders*, may be the most important part of all, because authority only flows to those who live under authority. There we will talk about Lordship, and about the kind of grace that does not excuse us but empowers us.

Part Five, *Trained for War*, turns everything into practice: a daily pattern for the warrior, and a twenty-one day practice that will take the truths of this book out of your head and work them into your habits. Please do not skip it. Revelation without rhythm usually fades.

A few suggestions as you go. Read slowly. Keep your Bible open beside you and look up the verses for yourself. Read the Scriptures out loud, because the sword of the Spirit was made to be spoken. And let the Holy Spirit put His finger on anything in your life that needs attention. This is not a book to admire. It is a book to obey.

The spoils of war belong to the victorious King. And because you belong to Him, you are called to walk in what He has

already won. So let's begin.

PART ONE — THE WAR IS REAL, AND IT IS ALREADY WON

CHAPTER 1

Fans in the Stands or Warriors on the Field

Somebody once described a big football game as seventy thousand people who badly need exercise watching twenty-two people who badly need a rest. We laugh, but if we are honest, that description fits a good deal of modern Christianity. Many believers know all the plays. They can tell you the score. They wear the team colors on Sunday. They cheer when someone else scores a touchdown for the Kingdom, and they groan when someone fumbles. But they have never once stepped onto the field.

The New Testament describes the people of God in many beautiful ways. We are a family. We are a temple. We are the bride of Christ. But we are also an army. When Paul came to the end of his letter to the Ephesians, he did not describe believers as tourists strolling through neutral territory. He wrote, **"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."** (Ephesians 6:10-11) Nobody hands a tourist a breastplate. Armor is for soldiers. And that means the Christian life is not merely private devotion and gradual moral improvement. It includes a real confrontation with a real, organized opposition.

You Were Drafted the Day You Were Born Again

Here is something many believers were never told when they gave their lives to Jesus: spiritual warfare is not optional. It comes with salvation. The moment you moved from darkness into light, you changed sides in a war that was already raging.

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

(Colossians 1:13)

That word "conveyed" is a moving word. It describes a whole population being carried from one country to another. You did not just get a little religious upgrade. You changed kingdoms. You changed passports. You changed allegiance. **"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."** (Philippians 3:20) You are no longer simply trying to survive this world until you get to heaven. **"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us."** (2 Corinthians 5:20) An ambassador lives in a foreign country, but he represents another government, and everything he does carries the weight of that government behind it.

Now think about how the enemy sees that. If he could not stop you from becoming a Christian, he will do everything he can to stop you from becoming a fighting Christian. He would much rather you sit in the stands, polite and harmless, than walk onto the field and start taking back what he stole. Some believers imagine that if they stay quiet and keep their heads down, the devil will leave them alone. But the kingdom of darkness does not honor neutrality. Passivity does not buy you peace. It only makes your resistance weaker when the attack comes, and it will come.

Not Against Flesh and Blood

Before we go any further, we need to make sure we are aiming at the right target. **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."** (Ephesians 6:12)

That little phrase, "not against flesh and blood," may save your marriage, your church and your sanity. It means people are not your ultimate enemy. Your husband is not the enemy. Your wife is not the enemy. Your difficult boss, your rebellious teenager, the neighbor who lets his dog bark all night, the politician you cannot stand: none of them is the real enemy. People may cooperate with darkness, sometimes knowingly and often not, but they are not the deepest source of the conflict. The conflict runs beneath what we can see.

Have you ever watched a bullfight? The bull charges the red cape with all its strength, again and again, while the matador stands calmly to one side. The poor animal wears itself out attacking a piece of cloth. That is exactly what happens to believers who forget Ephesians 6:12. They spend all their energy charging at people while the real enemy stands off to the side, untouched.

I think of a couple I will call Ray and Donna. For years their home was a battlefield. Every disagreement turned into a war, and each was convinced the other one was the problem. Things began to change the night Ray stopped arguing and said, "Donna, you are not my enemy. Something is trying to destroy this family, and it isn't you." They knelt together beside the bed, and for the first time in years they fought on the same side. Their problems did not vanish overnight, but the target changed, and that changed everything.

This is why a warrior is not someone who is angry at people. We love people. We pray for people. We bless those who curse us.

Our fight is with the lies, the spirits and the powers that manipulate the atmosphere behind them.

The Christianity the Devil Does Not Fear

Let me ask a sober question. What kind of Christian does the enemy actually fear?

He does not fear casual Christianity. He is not intimidated by people who attend church, sing the songs, check the box, and then live the rest of the week exactly like everyone else. He does not fear religious routine without surrender. He does not fear fans of Jesus. He fears followers who have decided that their lives are no longer their own.

Jesus had strong words for a church that had grown comfortable.

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16) Lukewarm is the temperature of the spectator. It is the faith that likes Jesus but does not want to be inconvenienced by Him.

Notice how the enemy usually works on believers. He rarely begins with obvious destruction. He does not show up on Monday morning with horns and a sign that says, "I am here to ruin your life." He begins with harmless distractions, small compromises, and the occasional seed of doubt. He wants to win your future by sabotaging your Tuesday mornings and your Friday nights. He looks for the unguarded moments where prayer is skipped, holiness is relaxed, the Word is set aside, and identity is forgotten. A believer who is busy, distracted and a little bit compromised is no threat to him at all. He can let that person coast for years. We will look at his tactics more closely in the next chapter, but for now just notice this: casual Christianity is exactly what he wants.

Spectators and Warriors

So what is the difference between a spectator and a warrior?

A spectator watches. A warrior engages. A spectator has opinions about the game. A warrior has bruises from it. A spectator goes home when the weather turns bad. A warrior keeps standing in the rain. A spectator talks about what the team should have done. A warrior does it.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a wonderful picture. **"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."** (Hebrews 12:1) Do you see who is in the stands? It is the great heroes of faith who have finished their course. They are the ones watching. You and I are not supposed to be in the bleachers. We are supposed to be on the field, running, while they cheer us on.

Paul told young Timothy, **"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called."**

(1 Timothy 6:12) And at the end of his own life he could say, **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** (2 Timothy 4:7) Paul did not watch the fight. He fought it.

Now please hear what a warrior is, and what a warrior is not. A warrior is not loud for the sake of being loud. He is not someone who goes around looking for demons under the carpet. A warrior is someone who is surrendered to Christ, awake in the spirit, disciplined in the Word, empowered by grace, and bold enough to act when God says move. He prays when it is inconvenient. He obeys when nobody is watching. He speaks the name of Jesus when the room goes quiet. He refuses to let fear or comfort decide what he does. I wrote about this kind of faith in *Beyond the Pew*, available at faithwithoutborders.us, because the Christian life was never meant to be lived from a seat.

Not Afraid, Just Awake

Some of you may be feeling a little uneasy right now. All this talk of war and enemies can make a person want to pull the blanket over his head. But the right response to the reality of the war is not fear. Remember Colossians 1:13. You have been delivered. You have been transferred. That transfer is not symbolic. It is a change of kingdom, of authority, of ownership and of allegiance. You may be attacked, tempted, harassed, accused or opposed, but you are not the devil's property. He has no legal claim on you. That is where spiritual confidence begins.

Think of a soldier who knows the battle has already turned decisively in his army's favor. He still takes the fight seriously. He still wears his gear and watches his flank. But he does not tremble, because he knows how this ends. That is the believer's posture: serious, but not scared; alert, but not anxious.

So how do you leave the stands? It is simpler than you think. You start by telling the Lord, "I am done being a spectator. Whatever You want from me, I am available." You begin to treat prayer as engagement rather than a ritual. You open the Word as a soldier opens his field manual, looking for orders. You stop blaming people for what the enemy is doing, and you start praying for them instead. You begin to expect that God wants to use you, not only the pastor, not only the missionary, but you, in your home, your workplace and your neighborhood.

The world does not need more fans of Jesus. It has plenty of those. It needs followers. It needs warriors. It needs believers who have walked out of the stands and onto the field, not because they are fearless by nature, but because they know the One who has already won.

So here is the question this chapter leaves with you, and I want you to answer it honestly: are you still a fan in the stands, or have you stepped onto the field? The whistle has already blown. The game is on. And your Captain is calling your name.

CHAPTER 2

The Organized Kingdom of Darkness

Once a believer steps onto the field, the next question is obvious: who exactly are we up against? It is a fair question. No army goes into battle without studying the opposing side, and no sensible coach sends his team out without watching the other team's films. The Bible does not want us ignorant about the enemy. It does not want us obsessed with him either, but it does want us informed.

One of the most important truths in spiritual warfare is that Satan's kingdom is real, and it is organized. Jesus Himself made this clear. When the religious leaders accused Him of casting out demons by the power of the devil, He answered, **"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?"** (Matthew 12:25-26)

Notice what Jesus did not say. He did not say, "Satan is just a symbol of evil." He did not say, "There is no such thing as a devil's kingdom." He spoke of Satan's kingdom as something structured enough that, if it were divided, it would fall. In other words, the enemy's operations are not random chaos. They are coordinated.

Rank and Order in the Dark

Look again at the language Paul uses in Ephesians 6:12: principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. These are not casual words. They describe rank, hierarchy and spheres of operation.

Let me keep the cookies on the lower shelf. Think of any army you know. It has generals who set strategy over whole regions. It has officers who carry out that strategy in particular places. It has units assigned to particular tasks. And it has foot soldiers who do the day-to-day work on the ground. Paul is telling us that the kingdom of darkness is arranged in a similar way. Principalities suggest rulers over territories. Powers suggest those who exercise authority. Rulers of the darkness of this age suggest forces that shape the spirit of a culture. And spiritual hosts of wickedness suggest the vast numbers of evil spirits carrying out the orders.

Paul also says that before we knew Christ we **"once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."** (Ephesians 2:2) And John adds, **"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."** (1 John 5:19) This is why the enemy does not merely tempt individuals in isolated ways. He also works through systems, atmospheres, territories and repeated patterns of deception. In the chapter on Daniel's twenty-one days, we will see an example of this when a powerful spirit called the prince of Persia resisted an answer to prayer. For now, simply notice that the Bible takes the structure of darkness seriously.

Principalities over Cities and Cultures

If believers do not recognize the organized nature of darkness, they will fight as though every issue is only personal, when some issues are much larger than the individual. This explains a great deal.

It explains why certain lies seem to dominate an entire generation at the same time. It explains why a particular kind of confusion can sweep across a whole nation in just a few years. It explains why some cities seem to carry a spiritual atmosphere you can almost feel when you arrive. Take Las Vegas, for

instance. It is the kingdom of Lady Luck. The whole skyline seems to bow to the idea that your future depends on a roll of the dice. Other places are marked by other spirits: greed, violence, sensuality, religious pride, hopelessness. Anyone who has traveled widely in ministry, as Linda and I have, learns that cities and cultures are not spiritually neutral. Some ground is hard. Some is open. And there are reasons for that.

It also explains why there is so often coordinated resistance when the gospel begins to break through. A Bible study starts in a neighborhood, and suddenly every member has a crisis in the same week. A church begins to reach the lost in earnest, and division mysteriously springs up among the leaders. That is not a coincidence. That is an organized enemy responding to a threat.

Now a word of balance. Not every problem is a principality. Sometimes the problem is just poor planning, or a bad night's sleep, or our own flesh. A believer who blames a territorial spirit every time the car will not start has stopped discerning and started guessing. The point of understanding the enemy's structure is not to make us weird. It is to make us wise.

How the Enemy Fights

Paul told us to stand against **"the wiles of the devil"** (Ephesians 6:11). Wiles are schemes, tricks, carefully planned strategies. Let me name five of the most common, so that you will recognize them when they come knocking.

The first is deception. This is his native language. Jesus said, **"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."** (John 8:44) His very first recorded words in the Bible were a question designed to plant doubt: **"Has God indeed said...?"** (Genesis 3:1) He has been asking that same question

ever since. Has God really said He loves you? Has God really said you are forgiven? Has God really said that is sin?

The second is accusation. The Bible calls him **"the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night"** (Revelation 12:10). First he tempts you to sin, and then he condemns you for doing it. He is the only salesman who sells you the product and then sues you for buying it. We will see in the chapter on the blood how that accusation is silenced.

The third is distraction. Jesus warned that **"the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."** (Mark 4:19) Notice that none of those things is a demon with fangs. They are bills, busyness and shopping lists. The enemy does not need to destroy a believer who is too distracted to pray.

The fourth is compromise. Samson did not lose his strength in one dramatic moment. He lost it by lying down in Delilah's lap, again and again, playing a little closer to the edge each time, until one day **"he did not know that the LORD had departed from him."** (Judges 16:20) Compromise is a slow leak. You do not notice the tire going flat until you are stuck on the side of the road.

The fifth tactic is what I call deactivation. This is really the goal behind all the others. The enemy cannot un-save a child of God, so he tries to switch that child off. He wants believers who are saved but silent, forgiven but fruitless, filled with the Spirit but never moving in the Spirit. He wants a church full of light bulbs that are wired correctly but never turned on. Deception is how he does it. If he can convince you that you have no authority, you will never use it. If he can convince you that prayer does not change much, you will not pray. A deactivated Christian is exactly where he wants you.

That is why Paul said we must not let Satan take advantage of us, **"for we are not ignorant of his devices."** (2 Corinthians 2:11) A trick only works on someone who does not see it coming.

Organized, but Already Judged

Now we must be careful, because it is possible to talk so much about the enemy's organization that we make him sound like God's equal. He is not. Not even close.

Satan's kingdom exists, but it is not equal to the kingdom of God. It is organized, but it is not sovereign. He is not everywhere at once, he does not know everything, and he is not all-powerful. Those belong to God alone. He is a created being who rebelled, and he is a defeated one. Jesus said, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** (Luke 10:18) Looking ahead to the cross, He announced, **"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."** (John 12:31) And He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would convict the world **"of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."** (John 16:11)

Did you catch that? Is judged. Not might be, not will be someday if we work hard enough. The verdict is in. The cross was not a symbolic moral victory. It was a decisive blow against the powers of darkness. Satan was utterly and definitely defeated, and Christ rescued from his grip of death all who put their faith in the finished work of the cross. His final address has already been prepared: **"the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"** (Matthew 25:41).

So the organized kingdom of darkness still operates, but it operates as a defeated kingdom resisting its final exposure. Think of a snake whose head has been cut off. The body can still thrash around for a while, and you would not want to put your bare foot on it. But it is finished. Its thrashing is not a sign of strength. It is a sign of death.

Strategic, Not Scared

So what should all this produce in us? Some believers hear about principalities and powers and immediately get nervous. That is exactly the wrong response. The point of understanding the enemy's organization is not to make you anxious. It is to make you strategic.

It should produce vigilance, not fear. Alertness, not despair. Prayerfulness, not passivity. When we know the enemy is real and organized, we become less casual. When we know Christ has already triumphed, we become less intimidated. We need both truths at the same time, like two oars in a rowboat. Pull only on one and you go in circles.

Being strategic also means we do not become flippant. Even the archangel Michael, "in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (Jude 9) Michael did not trade insults with the devil. He did not make jokes about him. He simply invoked the authority of the Lord. That is our pattern too. We do not stand in our own strength or our own cleverness. We stand in Christ's authority.

Peter gives us the balance perfectly. He warns us that our adversary prowls like a roaring lion, and then he tells us exactly what to do about it: **"Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."** (1 Peter 5:9) Resist him. Not run from him. Not negotiate with him. Resist him, standing firm in faith, knowing that you are not alone. James says the same: **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7)

And here is the most wonderful part. God's plan is to put His victory on public display, and He intends to use you to do it. Paul wrote that God's purpose is **"that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities**

and powers in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 3:10) The church is God's billboard to the rulers of darkness. Every time an ordinary believer stands firm, prays with authority and walks in holiness, the principalities and powers get another lesson in who really won.

So yes, the enemy is organized. But so is heaven. And heaven's Commander has already won. In the next chapter, we will look closely at exactly what that victory accomplished, and at the treasure He took when He did it.

CHAPTER 3

The Spoils of War: What the Cross Actually Won

In the ancient world, when a war ended, everyone knew what came next. The victor took the spoils. The gold, the weapons, the cattle, the treasure and the captives of the defeated army now belonged to the winner. Nobody debated it. It was simply the law of war: the one who wins, takes.

There is a wonderful story about this in the life of David. While he and his men were away, raiders burned their town and carried off their wives, their children and everything they owned.

David's men were so grief-stricken they talked about stoning him. But David **"strengthened himself in the LORD his God"** (1 Samuel 30:6), pursued the raiders, and won. Then the Bible says, **"And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all."** (1 Samuel 30:19)

That is the heart of this book. What the enemy stole, Jesus took back. And not only did He take it back, He took the enemy's own goods as plunder. Isaiah saw it seven hundred years in advance when he prophesied of the Messiah: **"Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death."** (Isaiah 53:12) Because He poured out His soul, He divides the spoil. The cross was not just where Jesus died. It was where He won.

Disarmed and Paraded

Paul gives us the clearest picture of this victory in his letter to the Colossians. **"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."** (Colossians 2:13-15)

Look at the three things Jesus did to the powers of darkness in that last verse. He disarmed them. He made a public spectacle of them. And He triumphed over them.

The people Paul was writing to knew exactly what that language meant, because they lived in the Roman world. When a Roman general won a great victory, the Senate sometimes awarded him a triumph. It was the biggest parade the ancient world knew. The victorious general rode through the streets of Rome in a golden chariot. Ahead of him were wagons piled high with the captured treasure and weapons of the defeated enemy. Behind him, in chains, walked the conquered kings and generals, stripped of their armor, shuffling along for the whole city to see. The crowds roared. Everyone could see who had won and who had lost.

That is the picture Paul paints of the cross. To human eyes, Calvary looked like the worst defeat in history. There was Jesus, naked, bleeding, mocked and nailed to a Roman cross. The powers of darkness surely thought they had won. But Paul says that in the very place where it looked like Jesus was being paraded in shame, He was actually parading them. The cross was His triumphal procession. He stripped the enemy of his weapons, chained him to His chariot, and put him on public display. When Jesus cried out, **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30), He was not

saying, "I am finished." He was saying, "It is done. The work is complete. The victory is won."

And here is the best part. Paul says elsewhere, **"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."** (2 Corinthians 2:14) You are not one of the chained captives in that parade. You are riding with the Victor.

The Strong Man Bound

Jesus Himself gave us another picture of what He came to do.

"Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." (Matthew 12:29)

Luke records the same teaching with even more detail: **"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."** (Luke 11:21-22)

The strong man is Satan. His house is the world system and the lives of people held captive in it. For a long time his goods were "in peace," meaning nobody could challenge his hold on them. Then a Stronger One came. Jesus walked into the strong man's house, overpowered him, stripped him of the armor he trusted in, and started handing out the plunder.

The Bible tells us plainly that this was the whole purpose of His coming. **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."** (1 John 3:8)

And again, **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."**

(Hebrews 2:14-15)

Think about that. The enemy's greatest weapon was death and the fear of it. Jesus walked straight into death, and from the inside He broke its power. It is like a burglar who thinks he has trapped the homeowner in the basement, only to discover the homeowner has the keys to every door and has called in the authorities. This was announced way back in the garden, when God told the serpent that the Seed of the woman **"shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."** (Genesis 3:15) The serpent struck the heel at Calvary. But the Seed crushed the head.

Captivity Led Captive

There is one more picture I want you to see. Writing about Christ's ascension, Paul says, **"Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.'"** (Ephesians 4:8)

What a phrase! "He led captivity captive." The one who had been holding people captive was himself taken captive. The jailer ended up in chains. And then, like a conquering king returning home, Jesus distributed gifts. A king who wins a war shares the spoils with his people, and that is exactly what our King did.

I want you to notice something important here. When we talk about the spoils of war, the most precious plunder Jesus took was not gold. It was people. The goods in the strong man's house were human beings, men and women and children held in bondage to sin, fear, addiction, sickness and death. When Jesus plundered that house, He was setting captives free. You were part of the plunder. Every person who has ever been saved is a trophy of the cross, carried out of the strong man's house and into the Father's house.

What the Spoils Actually Are

So what exactly did the cross win? What belongs to the victorious King, and by extension to those who belong to Him?

Let me name some of the spoils, not as a complete list, but so that you can begin to see how rich the inheritance is.

First, people set free. Jesus defined His own mission this way:

"He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18) Liberty for captives is the first spoil, and it is the one closest to His heart.

Second, forgiveness and a clean record. The handwriting of requirements that was against us has been wiped out and nailed to the cross. The enemy's file on you has been shredded.

Third, healing. **"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."**

(Isaiah 53:5) Healing belongs to the spoils, and we may confidently ask God for it. God heals in many ways, sometimes instantly, sometimes gradually, and very often through the skill of doctors and nurses, whom we can thank Him for. Seeking God and seeing a doctor are not rivals. And if someone you love has not yet seen healing, that is never a reason to blame them or their faith. We stand on the promise and trust the Lord with what we do not yet understand.

Fourth, peace. **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."** (John 14:27)

Notice that the chastisement for our peace was laid on Him. Peace was purchased, and it is ours.

Fifth, provision. **"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."**

(Philippians 4:19) Not every want, but every need, out of a treasury that never runs dry.

Sixth, authority. The enemy was disarmed, and the authority he once wielded over us was taken from him and placed in the

hands of the risen Christ, who now shares it with His people. We will spend the whole next chapter on that.

No wonder Paul could write, **"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."**

(Romans 8:37) A conqueror wins the battle. One who is more than a conqueror enjoys the spoils of a battle someone else won for him.

We Enforce, We Do Not Earn

Now, if all of this is true, why do so many believers live as though the war were still undecided? Why do so many Christians live in fear, defeat, oppression and lack, when the spoils have already been won?

Let me answer with a piece of history. On the first of January, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation declared that enslaved people in the rebelling states were free. It was signed, sealed and official. But in parts of Texas, enslaved men and women did not hear the news until June of 1865, two and a half years later, when Union soldiers rode in and announced that they were free. For two and a half years they were legally free and practically bound. Their freedom was real, but it had not yet been announced and enforced where they lived.

That is exactly where many believers are living. The proclamation has been signed in the blood of Jesus. The enemy has been disarmed. The spoils have been won. But until that truth is announced, believed and enforced, people go on living as though the old master still owns them.

So let me be very clear about our job. We do not earn the victory. We cannot add one thing to what Jesus finished. We do not fight to make Him the winner. He already is. Our part is enforcement. We announce the news. We stand on the verdict. We refuse to let the defeated enemy keep squatting on ground that belongs to the King. We take back, in His name, what the enemy is still trying

to hold. **"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."** (Romans 16:20) Notice whose feet. Christ won the victory, and now He crushes the enemy under ours.

That is what it means to fight from victory rather than for it. A soldier fighting for victory is anxious and uncertain. A soldier enforcing a victory already won walks with a quiet confidence that no threat can shake. He knows how the story ends, because he has read the last page.

So the next time the enemy tries to take back ground in your life, your family, your health, your peace or your future, do not panic and do not beg. Remind him of the parade. Remind him who rode in the chariot and who walked in chains. Remind him that the strong man has been bound and his house plundered. Say it out loud if you have to: "That belongs to Jesus. He won it. And I am walking in it."

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57) The spoils of war belong to the victorious King. And because you belong to Him, they belong to you.

CHAPTER 4

Sons, Not Beggars: Identity and Authority

Jesus told a story about a young man who demanded his inheritance early, left home, and wasted every cent of it. When he finally hit bottom, feeding pigs and wishing he could eat what they ate, he came to his senses and started walking home. On the way, he rehearsed a speech. You know the one. **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."** (Luke 15:18-19)

But he never got to finish it. His father saw him a long way off, ran to him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. And before the son could get to the part about being a hired servant, the father interrupted: **"Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet."** (Luke 15:22) The robe said, "You are honored." The ring said, "You carry the family authority." The sandals said, "You are a son, not a slave," because servants went barefoot.

Here is the sad thing. A great many believers have been welcomed home, robed, ringed and sandaled, and they are still reciting the hired servant speech. They are sons and daughters of the King living like beggars at the back door. And the enemy loves it, because a believer who does not know who he is will never use what he has.

The Untapped Inheritance

There is an old story about a poor man who saved for years to buy a ticket on an ocean liner to America. He had just enough

money for the ticket, so he packed a small bag of crackers and cheese to eat on the voyage. Every day, while the other passengers went into the grand dining room, he sat in his cabin eating crackers. On the last day, a steward asked him why he never came to the meals. The man explained he could not afford them. The steward looked at him in astonishment. "Sir, every meal was included in the price of your ticket."

That is one of the great tragedies in the body of Christ: untapped inheritance. What Jesus purchased with His blood is often admired from a distance but not possessed in daily life. Believers pray for power as though it were a faraway reward reserved for a spiritual elite, when the Bible presents it as the birthright of every son and daughter.

Paul explains the problem perfectly. **"Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all."** (Galatians 4:1) Do you see it? An heir who does not understand his position lives exactly like a slave, even though he legally owns everything. But Paul goes on: **"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."** (Galatians 4:7)

And in Romans he says, **"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."** (Romans 8:15-17) Joint heirs with Christ! Whatever belongs to Jesus has been shared with you. That is why Paul prayed that our eyes would be opened, **"that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe."** (Ephesians 1:18-19) The problem is not that God has failed to

provide. The problem is that we have not seen what He has provided.

Authority Given to Ordinary Disciples

Let's look at one of the clearest statements of the believer's authority in the whole Bible. Jesus had sent out seventy of His followers to preach and heal, and they came back bubbling over.

"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

(Luke 10:17) Jesus replied, **"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."**

(Luke 10:19)

Who were these seventy? We do not even know their names. They were not apostles, they were not famous, and most of them never appear in the Bible again. They were ordinary followers of Jesus. And to them He said: I give you authority over all the power of the enemy.

Notice the difference between two words. The enemy has power. But the believer has authority. Power is strength; authority is the right to use strength. A traffic officer standing in the middle of a busy intersection has no power to stop an eighteen-wheeler with his body. But when he raises his hand, that truck stops, because he carries authority. The enemy may have power, but you have been given authority over all of it.

Then Jesus added a beautiful word of balance: **"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."**

(Luke 10:20) Authority is real, but it is not the center.

Relationship is the center. We do not rejoice mainly because demons obey us. We rejoice because we belong to the Father. And it is precisely because we belong to Him that the demons have to obey.

The Same Spirit, the Same Seat

Two more truths form the foundation of your authority, and I want you to take hold of them.

The first is about what lives inside you. **"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** (Romans 8:11)

This is not poetry. It means the same Spirit who walked into a sealed tomb and raised a dead Man to life has taken up residence in you. If you are in Christ, you are not merely a forgiven version of your old self. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The second truth is about where you sit. Paul tells us that God raised Christ from the dead **"and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named."**

(Ephesians 1:20-21) Then, a few verses later, he says something astonishing about us: God **"made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 2:5-6)

Seated. Not pacing nervously. Not standing in line hoping to be noticed. Seated, because the work is finished. And seated where? Far above all principality and power. That means when you deal with the enemy, you are not looking up at him. You are looking down. Your position is not determined by how you feel on a Tuesday morning. It is determined by where God has placed you in Christ. Feelings rise and fall, but your seat does not move.

Power, Love, and a Sound Mind

If all this is true, then why do so many believers feel so timid? Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy, who seems to have

struggled with exactly this. **"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."**

(2 Timothy 1:7)

Fear does not come from God. When fear whispers that you are too small, too weak, too sinful or too ordinary to stand against darkness, you can know where that voice comes from, and it is not your Father. What God has given you is power, the ability to act. He has given you love, which keeps your authority from turning harsh or proud. And He has given you a sound mind, a steady, disciplined way of thinking that does not panic and does not go to extremes.

I love that God put those three together. Power without love becomes bullying. Love without power becomes sentimental. And either one without a sound mind becomes foolish. But together they produce a believer who is bold and gentle, confident and humble, strong and sane.

Praying as a Son

Your identity changes the way you pray. Listen to how many believers approach God: "Lord, I know I'm not worthy, and I'm sorry to bother You again, and I know You're very busy, but if it's not too much trouble, and if it be Your will, maybe You could possibly..." That is the hired servant speech again. It sounds humble, but it is actually unbelief dressed up in humble clothing.

Now listen to how the Bible tells us to come: **"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** (Hebrews 4:16)

Boldly. Not arrogantly, but confidently, the way a child walks into his father's kitchen and opens the refrigerator without asking permission, because he lives there.

A son does not come wearing his own rags. He comes wearing the robe of righteousness his Father gave him. He comes in the name of Jesus. He comes trusting his Father's character and his

Father's Word. That does not mean a son never asks. Of course he asks. But he asks as family, not as a stranger. Remember what the father told the older brother in that same story, the one who had stayed home and still lived like a servant: **"Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours."** (Luke 15:31) All that I have is yours. Some of us need to hear that sentence until it sinks all the way in.

This truth is so central to living the Christian life that I gave a good portion of the Handbook for a Disciple of Jesus, available at faithwithoutborders.us, to helping new believers understand who they are in Christ. Everything else rests on it.

Stop Asking the Devil to Please Leave

Here is where identity becomes very practical. Many believers who would never think of begging God have somehow learned to beg the devil. "Oh, please leave me alone. Please stop attacking my family. Please, devil, just go away." Can you imagine a homeowner finding a raccoon rummaging through his pantry and politely pleading with it to consider leaving? No. He opens the door and puts it out.

The Bible never tells us to plead with the enemy. It tells us to resist him. **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7) Notice the order. First, submit to God. That is where your authority comes from, as we will see in the chapters on Lordship. Then resist the devil. And then, he will flee. Not might. Will.

Jesus showed us how. When the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, He did not plead or bargain. He said, **"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"** (Matthew 4:10) That was not a request. It was an order.

So when fear comes knocking, when heaviness tries to settle on your home, when the enemy brings up your past for the

hundredth time, do not grovel. Stand up in who you are. You might say something like this: "Satan, you have the wrong address. I am a child of God, seated with Christ far above you. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in me. In the name of Jesus, I resist you, and you must go." In the next chapter we will see exactly why that name carries such authority.

This is the moment where everything changes. When a person believes he is only a broken sinner with no authority, he will never confront darkness with confidence. But when he sees himself in Christ, his prayers change, his words change, his posture changes, and his obedience becomes bold. He stops reciting the hired servant speech and starts living like a son.

So take off the beggar's rags. The robe is already on your shoulders. The ring is already on your finger. The sandals are already on your feet. You are not a beggar at the back door. You are a son at the Father's table, and the spoils of the King's victory have been placed in your hands.

CHAPTER 5

The Name of Jesus: Your Power of Attorney

Some years ago a friend of mine had to travel overseas for several months, and before he left he signed a document giving his brother power of attorney. From that day on, his brother could walk into a bank, sign a contract, sell a car, or settle a bill, and the bank teller did not ask, "Who are you?" She asked, "Whose name are you signing?" The brother had not suddenly become rich. He had not earned anything. He simply carried a name that was not his own, and everything that name owned stood behind his signature.

That is exactly the picture the New Testament paints when it tells us to pray, heal, preach and drive out darkness "in the name of Jesus." Those words are not a polite way to sign off a prayer, like "yours sincerely" at the bottom of a letter. They are the legal authority of heaven placed in the hands of ordinary believers. If the cross won the spoils of war, the name of Jesus is how those spoils are collected. The victory belongs to Him; the name is how He lets us use it.

The Name Above Every Name

Before we talk about using the name, we must settle how big the name is. Paul wrote one of the most magnificent passages in all of Scripture about it. After describing how Jesus humbled Himself all the way to the cross, he says, **"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of**

those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

(Philippians 2:9-11)

Look at the three territories in that verse: heaven, earth, and under the earth. There is no realm left over. There is no back room in the universe where some demon can hide and say, "That name does not reach me here." Sickness has a name, and it must bow. Fear has a name, and it must bow. Every principality and power we described in the earlier chapters has a name and a rank, and every one of those names sits underneath His. Peter told the rulers in Jerusalem, **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12) There is no other name. Not a second-best name, not a backup name. One name.

Ask in My Name

On the night before the cross, Jesus did something remarkable. He handed His disciples a blank check. **"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."**

(John 14:13-14) A few chapters later He said it again, and this time He made it plain that something brand new was beginning: **"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."**

(John 16:23-24)

"Until now you have asked nothing in My name." Those disciples had walked with Jesus for three years. They had prayed, watched miracles, even cast out demons. But they had never yet come to the Father carrying the name of a risen, victorious Son. After the cross and the resurrection, everything changed. The

Son who had defeated the enemy now gave His family the right to come to the Father with His own name on their lips.

Now we must be honest, because some contemporary churches have taken these verses and turned them into a vending machine: put in the words "in Jesus' name," press the button, and out comes whatever you ordered, whether a bigger house or a better parking spot. That is not what Jesus meant. To ask in someone's name is to ask on his behalf, for his purposes, in agreement with his will. My friend's brother could not use the power of attorney to buy himself a sports car. He could only act in the interest of the one whose name he carried. John says it clearly: **"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."** (1 John 5:14) Jesus also tied the promise to relationship: **"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."** (John 15:7) When His words live in you, your desires start to sound like His. Then the blank check is safe in your hands, because you are writing what He would write. And when you pray for the salvation of a neighbor or the breaking of a chain in your family, you are asking for exactly what the name was given for. Pray with confidence.

What Do You Have? The Name

The early church did not just pray in the name; they acted in it. One afternoon Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray, and a man lame from birth was carried to the gate to beg. He held out his hand expecting a coin. Peter looked at him and said, **"Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."** (Acts 3:6) And the man went walking and leaping and praising God.

I love that Peter was broke. No money, no building, no title. But he knew what he did have, and it turned out to be the most

valuable thing on earth.

When the crowd came running, Peter made sure the credit went to the right place: **"And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."** (Acts 3:16) Notice the two pieces: the name, and faith in the name. The name supplied the authority. Faith was the hand that reached out and used it.

Jesus said this would be normal for His followers: **"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues."** (Mark 16:17) He did not say "those who are ordained" or "those who have been Christians for twenty years." He said those who believe. When the seventy came back from their first mission trip they could hardly contain themselves: **"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."** (Luke 10:17) Ordinary people, carrying an extraordinary name.

The Badge and the Man Wearing It

Here is another way to see it. Picture a police officer standing in the middle of a busy intersection. He raises his hand, and a truck weighing forty tons grinds to a stop. Now, that officer could not stop that truck with his own strength if he tried. If the truck wanted to argue physics, the officer would lose. But the driver does not stop because of the officer's muscles. He stops because of the badge. Behind that badge stands the whole authority of the government.

The devil is bigger than you. He is older than you, smarter than you, and more experienced than you. If you try to fight him in your own name, you will lose every time. But you do not stand in the intersection in your own name. You stand wearing the badge of the One who disarmed every power of darkness. When you

raise your hand and say, "In the name of Jesus, stop," the enemy is not looking at your size. He is looking at the badge.

But here is the other half of the analogy, and it matters just as much. A badge only works when it is issued by the authority. If a man buys a costume badge at a party shop and starts directing traffic, he is going to get flattened, and then arrested. The badge is not magic. It works because the officer truly belongs to the force that issued it.

The Sons of Sceva: A Name Is Not a Magic Word

Scripture gives us one of the most sobering and, frankly, one of the funniest stories in the Bible to make this point. In Ephesus, God was doing unusual miracles through Paul. Some traveling exorcists saw the results and decided to borrow the formula.

"Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.'" (Acts 19:13)

Did you catch it? "The Jesus whom Paul preaches." Not the Jesus they knew. Paul's Jesus. Secondhand Jesus. Seven sons of a man named Sceva tried it, and the result is recorded for all time:

"And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." (Acts 19:15-16)

Seven grown men running down the street without their clothes. I suspect they never tried that again. But please do not miss the lesson under the humor. The demon recognized Jesus. The demon recognized Paul. Both were known in the spirit realm. But these men were unknown, because they had no relationship with the One whose name they were using. They were using a costume badge.

Jesus warned that this would happen even among people who seemed impressive: **"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** (Matthew 7:22-23) The issue was never the words. The issue was relationship and obedience. The name of Jesus is not a password you type in. It is the name of a Person you walk with.

And here is the wonderful ending of that Ephesus story: **"This was known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."** (Acts 19:17) Even the failure of the fakes made the real name famous. The whole city realized that this name could not be borrowed, bought or faked. It had to be known.

So, friend, the question is not, "Do you know the right words?" The question is, "Does hell know your name?" Not because you are famous, but because you belong to Jesus, you carry His name honestly, and you live under His lordship. When that is true, you do not have to shout the name like a nervous man waving a fake badge. You can speak it quietly and watch the truck stop.

Living Under the Name

The name of Jesus is not only for emergencies. It is meant to cover all of life. **"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."** (Colossians 3:17) That means your work, your marriage, your business dealings and your Tuesday afternoon all carry His signature. An ambassador does not represent his country only at formal dinners. He represents it every moment he is abroad. **"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us."** (2 Corinthians 5:20)

So how do we use the name in daily warfare? Simply and boldly. When fear rises in the night, you do not need a paragraph; "In the name of Jesus, fear, leave my house" will do. When you lay hands on a sick friend, you can pray with faith in His name, and still drive them to the doctor afterward, because God works through both. When you sense darkness pressing on your family, you speak His name over your children.

And when it works, and it will, remember what Jesus told the excited seventy: **"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."** (Luke 10:20) The greatest wonder is not that demons know His name. It is that heaven knows yours. Your power of attorney flows out of your place in the family. Stay close to the One whose name you carry, and you will never have to borrow it secondhand.

The Father has signed the document. The Son has won the war. The Holy Spirit lives in you to make it real. Now go to the bank, friend, and sign in His name.

CHAPTER 6

The Blood: The Legal Ground of Every Claim

If the name of Jesus is our power of attorney, the blood of Jesus is the reason the document is legal in the first place. A power of attorney is worthless if the estate behind it is bankrupt, or if a court has frozen the accounts. The blood is what settled every legal claim against us, paid every debt, and opened the accounts of heaven to sons and daughters of God. When we speak of spiritual warfare, we are not talking about who can shout loudest. We are talking about who has legal ground. And the blood of Jesus has removed every inch of the enemy's legal ground over a believer's life.

The book of Revelation describes the great victory of God's people this way: **"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'"** (Revelation 12:10-11) We will give a whole chapter later to the word of our testimony. In this chapter we stay with the first weapon in that verse, because everything else rests on it. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.

Welcome to the Courtroom

Notice what Satan is called in that passage: "the accuser of our brethren." His very title is a legal one. The word paints a picture

of a prosecutor standing before the bench, day and night, building a case. He is not making things up, at least not always. Often he is reading from the actual record. "Your Honor, this man lost his temper last Tuesday. This woman lied on her tax form. This one promised to pray and did not. This one has been struggling with the same sin for ten years."

The prophet Zechariah was given a glimpse into this courtroom. **"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?'"**

(Zechariah 3:1-2) Joshua was standing there in filthy garments. Satan had evidence. But God did not argue about the evidence. He rebuked the accuser, took away the filthy garments, and clothed Joshua in clean ones. The case was thrown out, not because Joshua was innocent, but because God had chosen him and made provision for his cleansing.

This is so important for the believer at war. Many Christians lose their battles not because the devil overpowers them but because he out-argues them. He shows them their record, and they agree with him. They say, "You're right, I'm a failure, I have no business praying with authority." And the moment they agree with the accuser, they lay down their weapons. That is why understanding the blood is not optional theology. It is your defense in court.

Paul asks the question that ends every trial: **"Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."** (Romans 8:33-34) Think about that. The Judge has already declared you righteous. Your Defense Attorney is the One who died for you and sits at the Judge's right

hand. The prosecutor has no case left. **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."**

(Romans 8:1) No condemnation. Not "less condemnation." None.

Why Blood?

Some people are uncomfortable with all this talk of blood. It sounds old-fashioned to modern ears, maybe a little gruesome. Some contemporary churches have quietly removed the hymns about the blood and stopped preaching it, hoping to make the message more pleasant. But when you remove the blood, you remove the legal ground of the whole gospel. You are left with a nice moral teacher and no way to deal with sin.

God explained the principle long ago: **"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."** (Leviticus 17:11) Sin is not a small thing that can be erased with an apology. Sin brings death. So the only way to pay for it is with a life. The writer of Hebrews puts it plainly: **"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."** (Hebrews 9:22)

All the blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament was like a down payment, a promissory note pointing forward. When Jesus died, He paid the full price with His own perfect life. **"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."**

(1 Peter 1:18-19)

The Night of the Doorposts

The clearest picture of the blood's protecting power is the first Passover. Egypt was under judgment. The destroyer was going through the land that night. Israel was not told to fight, or to hide,

or to try to be extra good. They were told to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts. **"Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."** (Exodus 12:13)

Notice: "When I see the blood." Not "when I see how nervous you are," or "when I see how well you behaved this month." The protection depended entirely on the blood. I imagine two families that night. In one house, the father is calm; he put the blood on the door and believes God. In the next house, the father is pacing, wringing his hands, worrying whether he did it right. Which house was safe? Both. The safety was on the doorpost, not in the father's feelings. But the calm father slept better!

Many believers live like the anxious father. They are covered, but they do not enjoy it. They are protected, but they keep worrying. Paul tells us who the Lamb really is: **"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."** (1 Corinthians 5:7) The blood is on your doorpost, friend. You may as well sleep well.

What the Blood Has Already Done

When the accuser comes, you need to know exactly what the blood has accomplished, so you can answer him point by point. Let me walk you through five great things the New Testament says the blood has done. Notice that every one is written in the past tense. These are finished facts.

First, the blood has redeemed you. **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."** (Ephesians 1:7) To redeem means to buy back. You were once in the enemy's pawnshop, and Jesus walked in and paid the full price. The heavenly song says, **"For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."** (Revelation 5:9) A pawnbroker has no

claim on an item once it has been paid for. When the devil comes knocking, he has the wrong address.

Second, the blood has justified you. **"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."** (Romans 5:9) Justified means declared righteous, as if you had never sinned. It is not that the Judge pretends. It is that the penalty has been fully paid by Another, so justice itself is on your side. The debt was not ignored; it was canceled. Paul says God **"wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."** (Colossians 2:14) The record the accuser reads from has been stamped "Paid in Full."

Third, the blood keeps on cleansing you. **"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."** (1 John 1:7) In the language John uses, "cleanses" carries the sense of continuing action. The blood is not only a one-time bath at the moment of salvation; it is a fountain that keeps flowing as we walk in the light. It also cleanses the conscience, that inner voice that keeps replaying old failures: **"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"** (Hebrews 9:14)

Fourth, the blood has brought you near. **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."** (Ephesians 2:13) You are not a stranger peeking through the fence at God's house. You are inside. That is why Hebrews says, **"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,"** (Hebrews 10:19) and then invites us: **"let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil**

conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

(Hebrews 10:22) Boldness to enter the Holiest. In the Old Testament, one man entered once a year, trembling. Now every believer may walk in, any hour, with boldness, because of the blood.

Fifth, the blood has made peace. God was pleased **"by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."** (Colossians 1:20) The war between you and God is over. Whatever battles you face with the enemy, you will never again have to fight God. He is not your opponent. He is your Father, your Commander, and your Defender.

Speaking What the Blood Says

Hebrews says something fascinating about the blood of Jesus. It speaks. We have come **"to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."** (Hebrews 12:24) Abel's blood cried out from the ground for justice and vengeance. The blood of Jesus cries out for mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance. It is always speaking in heaven on your behalf.

Our job is to agree with what the blood is saying. When Satan says "guilty," the blood says "forgiven." When he says "dirty," the blood says "cleansed." When he says "rejected," the blood says "accepted and brought near." When he says "you belong to me," the blood says "bought and paid for." We do not overcome the accuser by denying our faults or by promising to try harder. We overcome him by agreeing with the blood out loud.

I once knew a woman, I will call her Grace, who had been a believer for years but lived under a cloud of shame from her past. Every time she tried to pray, the old memories played like a film. One day a friend told her, "Grace, stop arguing with the devil about your past. He knows the facts better than you do. Just tell

him who paid for it." The next time the film started, she said out loud in her kitchen, "Yes, I did that. And the blood of Jesus has cleansed me from all of it. Take it up with Him." She said the cloud lifted like morning fog. The accuser had nothing left to say, because she had stopped pleading her own case and started pleading the blood.

Now, a word of balance. Agreeing with the blood does not mean pretending we never sin. John, who wrote that the blood cleanses us, also wrote, **"And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** (1 John 2:1) When you stumble, do not hide it and do not wallow in it. Bring it into the light, confess it, and receive the cleansing the blood has already purchased. Keeping short accounts with God takes away the accuser's ammunition before he can load it.

So the next time the accuser comes knocking, and he will, do not open the door to his evidence. Point to the doorpost. Tell him what the blood has done: redeemed, justified, cleansed, brought near, made at peace. Then go to sleep like the calm father on Passover night. The destroyer has to pass over. The blood is on the door.

PART TWO — THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

CHAPTER 7

The Battleground of the Mind

When most people hear the words "spiritual warfare," they picture something dramatic: a deliverance service, a midnight prayer meeting, maybe a scene from a movie. Those things are real, and we will talk about them later. But I want to tell you where most of the war is actually fought. It is fought in a place about six inches wide, between your ears. The great battlefield of spiritual warfare is the human mind.

That is where the enemy began his very first attack in the garden. He did not throw rocks at Eve. He asked her a question: **"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"** (Genesis 3:1) One small seed of doubt, planted in a mind, brought down the whole human race. Paul was worried that the same strategy would work again: **"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."** (2 Corinthians 11:3) If the devil can win the war of thoughts, he rarely needs to fight anywhere else.

A Stronghold Is a Lie Enthroned

Paul gives us the key passage for this whole chapter: **"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

What is a stronghold? It is a fortress. In ancient warfare a stronghold was a fortified place the enemy held, with high walls, from which he could launch attacks on the surrounding country. Paul says there are strongholds in the mind. And look at what they are made of: arguments, high things, thoughts. In other words, a stronghold is not always a demon sitting outside a person. Very often it is a lie sitting on a throne inside a person.

Here is how it gets built. A lie comes as a passing thought: "Nobody really cares about you." The first time, you notice it and maybe dismiss it. But it comes again, and again. Something happens that seems to prove it. You begin to repeat it to yourself. You start defending it: "Well, it's true, isn't it? Look at my life." You begin to act on it, pulling away from people, refusing help, expecting rejection. Before long the lie is not a visitor anymore. It has moved in, built walls, and put itself on the throne. Now every new experience gets interpreted through it. That is a stronghold. The mind begins to treat bondage as normal.

Jesus told us who the architect is. Speaking of the devil, He said, **"When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."** (John 8:44) The enemy's whole construction business runs on lies. That is good news, actually, because it means his strongholds have a weakness. They are built on something false, and falsehood cannot stand against truth.

Why Arguing Does Not Always Work

Have you ever tried to reason with someone and felt your words bouncing off a brick wall? You present the facts clearly, and they simply do not land. I think of the fellow who said, "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts!" We laugh, but we have all met him, and if we are honest, we have all been him.

That person may not lack intelligence at all. He may be held inside a stronghold. Paul explains what is happening with unbelievers: **"whose minds the god of this age has blinded,**

who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."

(2 Corinthians 4:4) That is more than ignorance. It is spiritual interference, like a radio signal being jammed. You can turn the volume all the way up and still get static.

This is why Paul says our weapons are "not carnal." Human logic, clever debate, raised voices and pressure tactics are carnal weapons. They may win an argument, but they do not pull down a stronghold. The weapons that work are spiritual: prayer that breaks the blinding, the truth of God's Word spoken in love, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the patient witness of a changed life. When you are praying for a loved one who seems unreachable, do not give up because your arguments failed. Change weapons. Pray that the blinding be lifted, and keep loving them while you wait.

Strongholds in Believers, Too

It would be convenient to think strongholds are only an unbeliever's problem. They are not. The mind is also where many Christians get wounded and stay wounded. Fear, resentment, unbelief, suspicion, indecision, and heaviness of heart can move in like repeated intruders if the mind is not guarded and retrained.

Some strongholds sound very religious. "God helps those who help themselves." "I'm just not the kind of person God uses." "My family has always been this way; it's in our blood." "I've been hurt by Christians, so I'll never trust a church again." Each of these sits on its throne, and each one exalts itself "against the knowledge of God." Each contradicts something God has said, and each quietly shuts down a believer's effectiveness. Remember, one of the enemy's favorite tactics is deactivation. He would love to leave you saved but switched off.

I know a man, I will call him Daniel, who served faithfully for years, but always on the edges. Whenever anyone asked him to lead, pray publicly, or share his faith, he declined. When a friend finally asked why, he said, "My father told me when I was eight that I'd never amount to anything." He was fifty years old, and an eight-year-old's memory was still sitting on the throne of his mind. It was not until he saw that this was a lie exalting itself against what God said about him, and began to replace it with Scripture, that the walls came down. Within a year he was leading a small group in his home. The stronghold had never been about his ability. It had been about a lie.

Taking Thoughts Captive in Practice

Paul's instruction is very practical: "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Picture a border checkpoint. Every thought that tries to cross into your mind must show its passport. "Where are you from? Who sent you? Do you agree with what Jesus says?" If the answer is no, that thought gets arrested at the border. It does not get to settle down and build a house.

How does that work on an ordinary Tuesday? Let me give you four simple steps.

First, notice the thought. Many of us live on autopilot and never examine what is running through our heads. Start paying attention. When you feel a sudden heaviness, fear, or anger, stop and ask, "What thought just came in?"

Second, name the lie. Be specific. Not "I feel bad," but "I am believing that God has forgotten me." A lie you can name is a lie you can fight. Vague darkness is hard to battle; a named lie is a target.

Third, find the truth that answers it. Every lie the enemy tells has a truth in God's Word that contradicts it. "God has forgotten me" meets Isaiah's word that God has engraved us on the palms of

His hands. "I can't change" meets **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Write those truths down. Keep them close.

Fourth, replace and rehearse. You do not just evict a lie; you install the truth in its place. Repeat it. Meditate on it. Think it on purpose, over and over, until it becomes your new normal. The lie got its throne through repetition. The truth will take that throne the same way.

The Divine Filter

God has given us a filter for the mind, and it is one of the most practical verses in the Bible: **"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."** (Philippians 4:8)

That verse is not wishful thinking. It is a filter, the way a water filter lets clean water through and catches the dirt. Is this thought true? Is it noble? Is it pure? Is it of good report? If not, it does not get in. Choosing to anchor your thoughts on what is excellent is a radical act in a world that feeds on bad news. It is the difference between being a sponge that soaks up every bit of surrounding noise and being a gardener who decides which seeds get to grow.

This is just as much about the health of the mind as it is about spiritual discipline. Look at the verses right before it: **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:6-7) God's peace stands guard over the mind like a sentry. Isaiah promised the same: **"You will keep**

him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3)

Now, I want to be gentle and clear here. Some people struggle with anxiety or depression that has physical causes, and there is no shame in seeing a doctor or counselor and taking the treatment they recommend. Renewing the mind and receiving medical care are not rivals. God works through both. But whatever help we receive, every believer can also practice the filter, and it will help.

Ask yourself honestly: what am I feeding my mind? What do I scroll through, watch, listen to, and talk about? You cannot spend three hours a night on news that stirs fear, gossip that stirs suspicion, and entertainment that stirs lust, and then wonder why your thought life is a battlefield. Paul warned, **"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey."** (Romans 6:16) Whatever your mind keeps bowing to will eventually rule you.

Transformed by Renewing

The goal is not just to defend the mind but to transform it. **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** (Romans 12:2) The world is constantly pressing us into its mold, like dough in a cookie cutter. The answer is not to try harder to resist the pressure. It is to be changed from the inside out by a renewed way of thinking.

Why does this matter so much? Because Solomon spelled out the law long ago: **"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."** (Proverbs 23:7) You become what you think. Your thoughts are like the coordinates you set in a GPS; your whole life eventually travels in that direction. If you keep thinking defeat, you will drift toward defeat. If you think the way God thinks, your life

will begin to move toward His purposes. **"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."** (Romans 8:6)

Peter adds a soldier's word: **"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."** (1 Peter 1:13) Gird up the loins of your mind. In those days men wore long robes, and before running or fighting they tucked the loose ends into their belts so they would not trip. Your mind needs the same. Tuck in the loose thoughts. Get ready to move.

In the chapters that follow, we will put on the whole armor of God piece by piece, and you will notice how much of it protects the mind: the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Word. That is no accident. God knows where the enemy aims first. So guard the gate. Check the passports. Pull down the lies that have sat on the throne too long, and put the truth of Christ back where it belongs. The battlefield of the mind is not lost territory, friend. It is ground Christ has already won, waiting for you to take it back.

CHAPTER 8

The Belt of Truth and the Breastplate of Righteousness

Paul was in chains when he wrote about the armor of God. Many believe he was chained to a Roman soldier at the time, which means he had plenty of hours to study every buckle and strap. And when the Holy Spirit moved him to describe how believers should stand against darkness, he looked at the soldier beside him and began to write: **"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."** (Ephesians 6:10-11)

Notice two things right away. First, it is the armor of God. You did not forge it; He did. It is part of the spoils Christ won and hands to His soldiers. Second, you must put it on. God provides; we appropriate. Armor hanging in the closet never saved anyone. **"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."** (Ephesians 6:13)

Then Paul begins the list: **"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness."** (Ephesians 6:14) These two pieces come first, and for good reason. They deal with what is happening on the inside. Before we can wield a sword or lift a shield, we must settle whether we are honest with God and whether our hearts are protected. Everything else rests on these.

The Belt That Gathers Loose Ends

A Roman soldier's belt was not a fashion accessory. It was a wide, heavy leather band that held everything together. Soldiers wore long tunics, and before a battle they gathered up the loose fabric and tucked it into the belt so they would not trip. The sword hung from it. Other pieces of the armor attached to it. Without the belt, everything else would flap, slip, and tangle.

That is a powerful picture. If there are loose ends in a believer's life, such as hypocrisy, religious pretending, vague talk, or self-deception, he will trip over them in battle. You can be in the right fight with the right weapons and still go down flat on your face because of something you left hanging. Truth is therefore not optional decoration. It is the first requirement for being able to move at all on the minefield of lies we walk through every day.

Truth on Two Levels

The belt of truth works on two levels. First, it is the truth of God's Word. Jesus prayed, **"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."** (John 17:17) We need an objective standard outside of ourselves. Our culture says, "Follow your truth." The disciple has a higher calling: follow the truth. Feelings change, opinions shift, trends come and go, but God's Word stays put. A soldier who buckles on the truth of Scripture has something solid holding him together when everything around him is spinning.

But the belt also means truth in the inward parts. David, after his terrible failure with Bathsheba, finally prayed, **"Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."** (Psalm 51:6) God is not interested in a polished outside covering a rotten inside. He wants honesty all the way down.

This is where many believers get stuck. We learn the right Christian phrases and use them to avoid reality. Someone asks, "How are you?" and we say, "Blessed and highly favored!" when

in fact we are drowning. We say, "I've given it to the Lord," when we have actually buried it and are nursing it in secret.

Christianese can become a costume that hides the truth even from ourselves. John put it bluntly: **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."**

(1 John 1:8)

Spiritual victory begins with honesty. If a person lies about his condition, excuses his compromise, or keeps hiding behind religious words, he will remain weak no matter how loudly he talks about warfare. Deliverance and growth both begin at the moment of truth, when we stop pretending. David described what pretending did to him: **"When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long."** (Psalm 32:3) And then he described what honesty did: **"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."** (Psalm 32:5) The belt went on, and the loose ends were gathered up.

The belt of truth also governs how we speak to one another.

"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another."

(Ephesians 4:25) Little lies, exaggerations on a résumé, padded expense reports, "the check is in the mail" when it isn't: these are loose threads, and the enemy knows how to pull them. A person of truth is very hard to manipulate, because he has nothing hidden for the devil to blackmail him with.

The Breastplate: Guarding the Heart

Next comes the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate covered the soldier's chest, protecting the heart and the vital organs. A soldier could survive a wound to the arm or the leg, but an arrow to the heart was the end of him.

Solomon gave us the command behind this piece of armor:

"Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23) That word "keep" carries the idea of a sentry guarding a fortress or a warden watching a gate. It is not a passive observation; it is an active defense. Everything we experience, our reactions, relationships, and resilience, flows out of the condition of the heart. Just as a contaminated spring ruins the entire stream, a heart filled with bitterness or fear will leak into every conversation and decision. A guarded heart acts like a filtration system, letting good things in and stopping poison at the gate.

Whose Righteousness?

Now here is the crucial question. Whose righteousness makes up this breastplate? If it is ours, we are in trouble. Our own goodness is about as protective as a breastplate made of tissue paper. The first time the accuser fires an arrow of guilt, it goes straight through.

Thank God, the breastplate is made of something far stronger.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

(2 Corinthians 5:21) Read that slowly. Jesus took our sin; we received His righteousness. It was the greatest exchange in history. Isaiah sang about it centuries before: **"For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."** (Isaiah 61:10)

This matters enormously in warfare because the enemy's main weapon against believers is accusation. If you stand in your own righteousness, you will collapse every time he reminds you of your failures. But when you stand in the righteousness of Christ, the accusation has no place to land. You can answer him, "Wrong address, devil. Christ has borne all my sins, and He has clothed me with His righteousness. Take it up with Him." As we saw in

the chapter on the blood, the legal case has already been settled. The breastplate is how you wear that verdict every day.

Integrity as a Weapon

But we must not stop there, because some contemporary churches do. They teach that because we have Christ's righteousness, how we live does not much matter. That is a dangerous misunderstanding. The righteousness given to us is meant to be worked out in us. Peter writes, **"but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"**

(1 Peter 1:15-16)

Holiness is not a boring list of restrictions. It is the life of a person set apart for God. And it is a weapon. Here is why. Satan looks for gaps in the armor. If he can draw a believer into secret sin, dishonesty, bitterness, sexual compromise, laziness, or double-mindedness, he does not need to destroy that believer right away. He just weakens his boldness. When a person is living in compromise, it becomes very difficult to pray with confidence. His voice shrinks. His courage fades. His authority becomes a theory instead of a reality.

John explains the connection: **"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God."** (1 John 3:21) And Solomon said, **"The wicked flee when no one pursues, But the righteous are bold as a lion."** (Proverbs 28:1) A clean conscience makes a lion. A guilty one makes a man who jumps at shadows.

Jesus could say something none of us can say on our own: **"for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."** (John 14:30) The enemy had no hook in Him, no handle to grab. Our aim, by grace, is to give the devil as few handles as possible. **"He who walks with integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will become known."** (Proverbs 10:9)

Integrity shows up in small places: how you treat the cashier, the driver who cuts you off in traffic, the relative who irritates you, the temptation nobody else knows about. Those small places are not small to God. They are the training fields of spiritual authority. I think of a businessman, I will call him Marcus, who discovered his company had been overpaid by a client for months. Nobody would ever have noticed. He called the client and returned the money. Months later, when he faced a frightening crisis in his family, he told me, "I could pray with my whole chest. There was nothing between me and God." That is the breastplate at work.

Now, holiness does not mean pretending to be perfect. It means surrendered honesty before God. When the Holy Spirit puts His finger on something, we do not use grace as an excuse to keep the door locked. We open the door, confess, and receive the power to change. That is how the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness work together. Truth admits the gap. Righteousness, received and lived, closes it.

Love: The Lining of the Breastplate

There is one more thing I want you to see about the breastplate. In another letter Paul described the same piece of armor with different words: **"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."** (1 Thessalonians 5:8) The breastplate of love.

That surprises some people. They think spiritual warfare is all about rebuking devils. But one of the deepest protections a believer can have is a heart that refuses hatred and stays alive in love. Bitterness is a crack in the breastplate. Paul warned, **"Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil."** (Ephesians 4:26-27) Unresolved anger gives the devil a place, a foothold, a little piece

of real estate in your heart. He also told the Corinthians to forgive quickly, **"lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."** (2 Corinthians 2:11)

Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to get sick. It does not hurt them; it eats through your armor. Righteousness that has no love in it turns hard and proud, and pride is just another gap. But a heart that keeps forgiving, keeps blessing, and keeps loving is very difficult for the enemy to penetrate. Faith itself, Paul says, works **"through love."** (Galatians 5:6)

Buckle Up

So the first two pieces of armor establish the inward basis for every battle. Truth removes deception and pretending. Righteousness protects the heart from accusation and corruption, and love keeps that righteousness soft and strong. Without these, the rest of the armor is worn poorly or not at all.

Let me encourage you to do something practical today. Ask the Holy Spirit, "Where are my loose ends? Where am I pretending?" Be still long enough to hear the answer. Then ask, "Is there any gap in my breastplate? Any secret compromise, any bitterness, any unforgiveness?" When He shows you, do not run from it. Bring it into the light. Confess it, receive His cleansing, make it right where you can, and forgive whoever you need to forgive.

Then stand up straight, buckle the belt, and strap on the breastplate. You are not standing in your own goodness. You are standing in His. And a soldier who is honest on the inside and covered by Christ's righteousness is a soldier the enemy will find very hard to bring down.

CHAPTER 9

The Shoes of Peace and the Shield of Faith

Not long ago a man I will call Joseph told me about his first week as a volunteer firefighter. The alarm went off at two in the morning, and he leaped out of bed, raced to the station, and then spent four precious minutes searching for his boots. The other men were already on the truck. "I learned something that night," he said. "You can have all the courage in the world, but if your boots aren't ready, you're not going anywhere."

Paul would have agreed. After the belt and the breastplate, he turns to the feet and then to the shield: **"and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."**

(Ephesians 6:15-16) The shoes keep the believer moving. The shield keeps him covered while he moves. One prevents paralysis; the other prevents penetration. Let us look at each.

Ready to Move

Roman soldiers wore sturdy sandals called caligae, with thick soles studded with nails, a little like the cleats on a football shoe. They gripped the ground. A soldier in those shoes could march long distances, stand firm on a slippery slope, and plant his feet when an enemy pushed against him. Many battles were won simply because one side kept its footing and the other did not.

Paul says our feet are shod with "the preparation of the gospel of peace." The key word is preparation, or readiness. The believer must be ready to minister, ready to speak, ready to respond,

ready to carry the good news the moment an opportunity comes. He must not be fumbling for his boots while the moment passes.

Peter says the same: **"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."** (1 Peter 3:15) Always ready. Not ready after you finish seminary, not ready when you feel more spiritual, but ready now. The coworker whose marriage is falling apart will not schedule his crisis for when you feel prepared. Readiness means living each day with your boots on.

God thinks those feet are beautiful. **"How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace."** (Isaiah 52:7) Paul quotes that same passage when he describes those who carry the gospel: **"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"** (Romans 10:15) Tired, dusty feet would never win a beauty contest, but heaven calls them beautiful because of where they carry the good news.

The Peace You Carry

This readiness requires more than enthusiasm. It requires that you actually have the peace you are offering. The gospel of peace is not merely a message to explain. It is an indescribable freedom: freedom from trying to earn God's favor, from worry, from fear, and most of all from our own plans and agendas. Jesus promised exactly this: **"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" (John 8:31-32)** And again: **"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."** (John 8:36)

That freedom is a reality to carry, not a theory to discuss. If a person has no peace, he will struggle to give peace to anyone else. You cannot give away what you do not have. A frantic,

anxious Christian sharing the gospel of peace is a bit like a man with his hair on fire selling fire extinguishers. People may hear the words, but they will believe what they see.

Jesus gave His peace as part of the inheritance: **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."** (John 14:27) His peace is not the absence of trouble; it is His presence in the middle of it. That kind of peace becomes solid ground beneath your feet. When everyone around you is slipping in panic, you can stand.

And here is something wonderful. Peace is not only a defensive posture. Paul promised the believers in Rome, **"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."**

(Romans 16:20) Under your feet. The very feet that are shod with the gospel of peace become the feet that God uses to crush the enemy. The devil hates peace because a peaceful believer cannot be stampeded.

The Big Shield

"Above all," Paul says, "taking the shield of faith." The Roman shield he had in mind was not the small round one you see in cartoons. It was the scutum, a large rectangular shield about four feet tall and more than two feet wide, curved to wrap around the body. A soldier could crouch behind it and be almost entirely covered. And when soldiers stood side by side, their shields locked together into a wall. The front row held theirs forward, the rows behind held theirs overhead, and the whole unit became like a turtle shell of wood and leather and iron.

That tells us something important. Faith is not a small, private shield that covers only one little area of life. It is large enough to cover the whole person, and wide enough to extend over others. Faith is not just optimism about a few personal matters. It is a broad, covering confidence in God that stretches over your mind,

your family, your calling, your work, your ministry, and your responsibilities.

This matters because the enemy's arrows are often indirect. If Satan cannot wound a believer directly, he will aim at what that believer loves. He goes after the children, the marriage, the health of a parent, the business that supports the family, the ministry that is bearing fruit. That is why parents, pastors, and leaders must carry a large shield. Look at how Satan described Job's protection: **"Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?"** (Job 1:10) The covering extended over the household and over everything he stewarded.

When the Philippian jailer asked how to be saved, Paul and Silas answered, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."** (Acts 16:31) Faith that starts in one heart has a way of spreading its covering over a whole home. Your faith is not only for you. Lift it high enough to cover the people God has entrusted to you.

And remember who the shield ultimately is. God told Abram, **"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."** (Genesis 15:1) The psalmist said, **"He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler."** (Psalm 91:4) Faith is not confidence in your own faith. It is confidence in Him. The shield works because of who stands behind it.

Quenching the Fiery Darts

Roman enemies sometimes dipped their arrows in pitch, lit them, and fired them in volleys. The goal was not only to wound but to set things on fire, to spread panic and chaos. Roman soldiers soaked their leather shields in water before battle, so that when

the burning arrows struck, they did not merely bounce off. They went out. Quenched.

The enemy's darts come at us in much the same way. They are inflamed thoughts, accusations, fears, imaginations and suggestions meant to set something on fire inside. Often they arrive as questions: What if God does not come through this time? What if the report is bad? What if your children never come back to the Lord? What if you fail? What if people reject you? Each one is lit and aimed, designed to start a blaze of panic in your mind.

When faith is soaked in the presence of God and grounded in His Word, those arrows do not ignite. They hiss and go out. Fear may fly over your head, but you do not let it build a nest in your hair. **"And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."** (1 John 5:4)

Now, faith does not mean you will never feel the impact of a dart. It means you choose to trust God while the pressure is on. And if a dart gets through, and sometimes one will, it is no reason to condemn yourself or anyone else. I have stood beside dear saints of great faith who still walked through deep sorrow and illness. Their faith was not small. The shield is not a promise that life will be easy; it is a promise that the fire will not consume you. Lift it again, and keep standing.

What Faith Really Is

So what is this faith that makes up the shield? **"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** (Hebrews 11:1) Faith is not a vague religious feeling. It is confidence rooted in the character and Word of God. It holds on when circumstances shout the opposite.

Abraham is the great example. **"And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's**

womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." (Romans 4:19-21) Notice that Abraham did not deny the facts. He looked squarely at a hundred-year-old body. Faith does not pretend that facts do not exist. It simply gives God's Word higher authority than the facts. And notice how he got stronger: by giving glory to God. Praise and faith grow together.

Faith is also active. Peter had to swing his leg over the side of the boat. **"So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"** (Matthew 14:29-31)

Peter usually gets remembered for sinking, but look closely. The wind did not change between the moment he was walking and the moment he was sinking. What changed was where he was looking. While his eyes were on Jesus, the water held him. When his eyes went to the wind, his shield dropped. And even then, Jesus caught him immediately. Faith is not never wobbling; it is keeping your eyes on Him and reaching for His hand when you do.

Soaking the Shield in Promises

How do you keep your shield soaked so the darts go out? With the promises of God. **"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** (Romans 10:17) Faith cannot remain vague. A general sense that "things will work out" will not quench a flaming arrow. You need to know what God has said, specifically, and stand on it.

Peter tells us how powerful those promises are: **"by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."** (2 Peter 1:4) The promises are not just encouraging thoughts. They are vehicles that carry the very nature of God into our daily lives. They are like a title deed, telling us what is already ours in Christ. And Paul assures us they are all guaranteed: **"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."** (2 Corinthians 1:20)

So here is a practical exercise. Think of the darts that most often come at you. Is it fear for your children? Worry about money? Dread about your health? Shame about the past? For each one, find a promise from God's Word that answers it. Write it on a card. Memorize it. When the dart comes, do not just grit your teeth. Raise the shield and say the promise out loud. You will be amazed how quickly the fire goes out.

The shoes and the shield work together. The shoes keep you moving in peace and readiness, so the enemy cannot freeze you in place. The shield keeps you covered in trust as you move, so his arrows cannot set you ablaze. So lace up your boots, friend, and lift that big shield high enough to cover everyone God has given you. Then step out. The God of peace is about to put the enemy under your feet.

CHAPTER 10

The Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit

If you have ever walked past a construction site, you have probably seen the sign on the fence: "Hard hats must be worn beyond this point." Nobody argues with that sign. Nobody says, "Well, I am a positive person, so I do not think anything will fall on me today." The workers simply put the helmet on, because they know that a single falling bolt can end a career in a second. The head is too important to leave uncovered.

Paul knew the same thing about the spiritual life. After the belt, the breastplate, the shoes and the shield, he comes to the last two pieces of the soldier's equipment, and they are a remarkable pair. One sits on the head. The other sits in the hand. One protects. The other attacks. **"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"**

(Ephesians 6:17). In this chapter we are going to look at both, because a believer who has the helmet but no sword will survive but never advance, and a believer who swings the sword with no helmet will not last long in the fight.

A Helmet Called Hope

What exactly is the helmet of salvation? Paul answers that question himself in another letter: **"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."** (1 Thessalonians 5:8). The helmet is hope. Not just salvation as a past event, but the confident expectation of everything salvation means, now and forever.

Now, when most people say "I hope it doesn't rain," they mean "I wish, but I doubt it." That kind of hope is a coin toss with a smile on it. Bible hope is the confident expectation of good, based on the promises of a God who cannot lie. It is setting your alarm because you know the sun will come up.

Why does Paul put hope on the head? Because the mind is where the enemy loves to aim. If the devil can convince you that your future is dark, he does not even need to touch your circumstances. You will give up on your own. You will stop praying, stop believing, stop obeying, and stop expecting anything from God. He does not need to defeat a man who has already defeated himself in his own head. That is why hope is not a luxury. It is protective equipment.

Pessimism Is Not a Personality Type

Let me say it gently but plainly: pessimism is not a harmless personality trait. It is spiritually dangerous. Many believers excuse a gloomy outlook by saying, "I am just a realist." But a realist who leaves God out of the picture is not being realistic at all. He is ignoring the biggest reality in the universe.

The believer has a promise that the pessimist does not have.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28). Notice that Paul does not say all things are good. Some things are terrible. Loss is real. Betrayal hurts. Disappointment cuts deep. But he does say that God is working all of it together for good for those who love Him. That means the believer has no final basis for a hopeless interpretation of his life. He may grieve, struggle and walk through severe tests, but he is not permitted to hand his future over to darkness.

The psalmist shows us how to do that. He did not pretend he felt fine. He talked to his own soul. **"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God;**

For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God." (Psalm 42:11). He told his feelings what to do. Jeremiah did the same thing in the middle of the ruins of Jerusalem: **"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."** (Lamentations 3:21-23). Notice the words "I recall to my mind." Hope is not something that falls on you like the weather. It is something you choose to recall, to rehearse, to put on. You pick up the helmet and you put it on your head.

And remember this: your past cannot define your identity, nor can it decide your destiny. God's word to His people in exile still stands: **"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."** (Jeremiah 29:11). If God has a future and a hope for you, then the devil has no right to tell you your best days are behind you. Wrong address, devil.

The Anchor That Holds

The writer of Hebrews gives us another picture of hope, and it is one of my favorites. **"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil"** (Hebrews 6:19).

Think about how an anchor works. It goes down out of sight and buries itself in the seabed. The ship does not hold on to itself; it holds on to something fixed that the storm cannot move. The wind can howl, but if the anchor is set, the ship stays where it belongs.

That is exactly what hope does. It is cast out of this unstable world into something eternal and unshakable. Our anchor is not fastened to our feelings, our bank balance, our health report, or the latest news headline. It is fastened behind the veil, in the very presence of God, where Jesus has gone ahead of us.

Circumstances change. Feelings rise and fall. But the anchor holds, because it is not attached to anything that can move.

This is why Paul could pray for the believers in Rome the way he did: **"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."** (Romans 15:13). God is called the God of hope. He does not ration it. He wants you to abound in it, to overflow with it, so that your mind is covered and your soul is steady no matter what the storm is doing.

The Sword in Your Hand

Now we come to the sword. Every other piece of armor Paul has mentioned is defensive. The sword is the one piece that goes on the offense. It does not just block; it drives the enemy back.

And what is the sword? **"the word of God."** (Ephesians 6:17). Not human opinion. Not clever arguments. Not the latest religious trend. The Word of God. And the Word is no blunt instrument. **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."** (Hebrews 4:12).

The clearest picture of how to use this sword is Jesus Himself in the wilderness. After forty days without food, the devil came to Him with temptation after temptation. And how did Jesus answer? He did not enter into a long debate. He did not try to out-argue the devil with philosophy. He did not share His feelings. "But He answered and said, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."'" (Matthew 4:4). Three times He was tempted, and three times He answered, "It is written." And at the end of it all: **"Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him."** (Matthew 4:11).

That scene tells us three things about the sword. The Word carries unquestioned authority; the devil had no comeback. The Word must be known; Jesus did not run off to look something up. And the Word must be spoken; Jesus said it out loud. Scripture stored in your memory is true, but it is not being wielded until it is taken up in faith and spoken into the conflict.

A sword hanging in a museum is still sharp, but it harms no enemy. In the same way, a Bible on the nightstand is a real Bible, but the devil is not afraid of a Bible on the nightstand. He is afraid of the Bible in the heart and in the mouth of a surrendered disciple. That is why the psalmist said, **"Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You."** (Psalm 119:11), and why Paul urged, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."** (Colossians 3:16). The Word should not be an occasional visitor in your life. It should live in you, furnish your thinking, shape your reactions and fill your mouth.

So start. Read it. Memorize it. Speak it. A sword you never practice with will feel clumsy in the day of battle.

Know the Real Thing, Spot the Counterfeit

Bank tellers learn to spot counterfeit money not by studying every fake, but by handling the real thing day after day until a fake feels wrong the moment it touches their fingers.

That is exactly how the Word protects us from deception. The Bible warns us that the enemy does not always come looking like the enemy. **"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light."** (2 Corinthians 11:14). He does not usually show up with horns and a pitchfork. He shows up with something that sounds spiritual, feels comforting and is almost true.

Watch what happened in the wilderness. When Jesus answered the first temptation with Scripture, the devil tried a new trick. He quoted Scripture back. **"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"** (Matthew 4:6). The devil knows the Bible. He just twists it, tears it out of context and bends it to his purpose. And how did Jesus answer? **"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"** (Matthew 4:7). The answer to twisted Scripture is more Scripture, rightly handled.

In some contemporary churches, people are taught ideas that sound lovely but do not stand up to the Word: that God's main goal is your comfort, or that you can follow Jesus without obeying Him. If you do not know the real thing, the counterfeit will look convincing.

No Armor for the Back

Before we leave the armor, there is one striking thing I want you to notice. Read through the whole list again, from the belt to the sword. There is no armor for the back. Not a single piece.

That tells us two things. First, the soldier of Christ is not meant to retreat. There is no protection for running away. **"But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."** (Hebrews 10:39). We face the enemy; we do not turn tail.

Second, it tells us we need one another. Roman soldiers did not fight as lone heroes. They stood in ranks, shoulder to shoulder, each man's shield partly covering the man beside him. The soldier behind you was your protection. In the same way, God never designed you to fight alone. **"Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."** (Ecclesiastes 4:12). This

is why the Bible insists, **"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."** (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Sadly, believers too often stab each other's backs instead of guarding them. Paul's warning is sobering: **"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"** (Galatians 5:15). The church is meant to stand together, not pierce each other from behind while claiming to be at war with the devil.

So the helmet and the sword bring protection and offense together. Hope keeps the mind from collapse. The Word gives the believer active authority. A hopeless mind cannot wield the sword well, but a mind protected by hope can speak the Word with steadiness and power. Put the helmet on. Take the sword in hand. And stand with your brothers and sisters, facing forward, because the enemy is already defeated and the King is leading the way.

CHAPTER 11

Praying Always in the Spirit

Imagine walking into a beautiful new kitchen. There is a shiny refrigerator, a fancy oven, a coffee machine that can do everything except drive you to work. It all looks wonderful. But then you notice that nothing is plugged in. The refrigerator is warm. The oven is cold. The coffee machine is just an expensive ornament. Every appliance is real and every one is useless, because none of them is connected to the power.

That is a picture of a believer who knows all about the armor of God but does not pray. Paul has described the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet and the sword. You would expect him to say "Amen" and move on. But he does not stop. In the very same breath, he adds the thing that plugs it all in: **"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"** (Ephesians 6:18).

The Piece That Holds It All Together

Prayer is not a seventh piece of metal hanging on the soldier's body. It is the life moving inside the armor. It is what keeps the belt fastened, the breastplate in place and the sword sharp. Without prayer, the armor becomes a costume. With prayer, it becomes equipment for battle.

Notice the little words Paul piles up in that verse: "always," "all prayer," "all perseverance," "all the saints." He is not describing a quick prayer before a meal or a hurried "Lord bless my day" on the way out the door. He is describing a whole life wrapped in prayer. "All prayer" means every kind: thanksgiving, asking, interceding for others, worship, confession, agreeing with God's

Word, standing against the enemy. Prayer has many rooms, and the believer is invited into every one of them.

The Christian the devil fears most is not the one with the most knowledge or the most impressive ministry. It is the one who prays. The enemy does not mind many kinds of religious activity. He can live with committees, programs and Sunday routines. But a believer who actually prays is a serious problem for his kingdom, because prayer brings the will of heaven into the affairs of earth.

The Background Connection

Paul gives a command elsewhere that sounds impossible at first: **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Pray without ceasing? How can anybody do that if they have a job, a family to raise, bills to pay and a schedule that never seems to slow down?

The answer is that prayer is not only a religious activity performed at a certain hour. It is a state of unbroken communion with the Lord. Think of it like an app running in the background on your phone. You may be texting, reading or taking pictures, but that app stays open and connected the whole time. In the same way, you may be driving, cooking, working, studying or sitting in a meeting, but the line to heaven stays open. The heart stays tuned. The mind keeps drifting back to the Lord, the way a compass needle always swings back to north.

Nehemiah gives us a perfect example. He was a servant in the palace of a pagan king, and one day the king noticed he looked sad and asked him what he wanted. Nehemiah had a split second before he answered. **"Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven."** (Nehemiah 2:4). There was no time to kneel, no time to light a candle, no time to find a quiet corner. He simply shot an arrow prayer to heaven

between the king's question and his own answer, and God gave him favor. That is what background prayer looks like.

Still, background prayer does not replace set times of prayer. Jesus, who was in perfect communion with the Father, still made time to be alone with Him. **"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."** (Mark 1:35). The set time fills the tank; the background connection keeps the engine running all day. You need both.

And when you pray, remember who you are. You do not come as a beggar hoping to get a crumb from a reluctant God. You come as a son or daughter, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, coming in the name of Jesus to a Father who loves you. **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:6-7). Notice what prayer does. It does not only change circumstances; it posts a guard over your heart and mind. Prayer itself becomes part of your armor.

Praying in the Spirit

Paul does not just say "pray." He says pray "in the Spirit." That little phrase is important, and I want to handle it warmly and carefully, because it is a precious gift that has sometimes become a battleground among believers instead of a weapon against the enemy.

At the simplest level, praying in the Spirit means praying with the Holy Spirit's help, under His leading, rather than just reciting words from our own heads. And thank God for that help, because there are times when we simply do not know what to pray.

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit

Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27).

Have you ever been so burdened that words failed you, and all you could do was groan before God? The Spirit was praying through you, and the Father understood every bit of it.

The New Testament also speaks of a particular way of praying in the Spirit: praying in tongues. On the day of Pentecost, **"they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."** (Acts 2:4).

Paul explains what happens when a believer prays this way:

"For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries." (1 Corinthians 14:2). It is prayer that goes past the limits of our understanding, straight from our spirit to God.

Paul did not treat this as strange or embarrassing. He said, **"I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all"** (1 Corinthians 14:18). And yet he was perfectly balanced about it. **"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."** (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). Notice: not one or the other, but both. Jude adds, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). Praying in the Spirit builds you up, like a soldier being strengthened before the fight.

Let me say a few gentle things here. Praying in tongues is not a badge of super-spirituality, and it is never a reason to look down on any brother or sister. It is not a test of whether someone is saved. Sincere believers have understood this gift in different

ways, and we must never let it divide the family of God. But neither should we be afraid of it or forbid it. Paul was clear: **"Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order."** (1 Corinthians 14:39-40).

If you have never prayed this way and you would like to, simply ask your Father. He is not stingy. **"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"** (Luke 11:13). A young man I will call Samuel once told me that he had been praying for his younger brother for months and had run out of words. "I had said everything I knew how to say," he told me. He asked the Lord to help him pray beyond his own understanding, and the Lord did. "I still pray with my mind," he said, "but now when my words run out, my prayer doesn't."

Watching: Eyes Open While You Pray

Paul adds another phrase: "being watchful to this end with all perseverance." Prayer is not only talking; it is watching. A soldier on night duty is not there to sleep. He is there to stay alert and notice anything moving in the dark.

The disciples learned this the hard way. On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took them into the garden and asked them to stay awake with Him. Instead, they fell asleep. **"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** (Matthew 26:41). And what happened next? Peter, who had slept instead of praying, suddenly woke up swinging a sword at the wrong target and, a few hours later, denied that he even knew Jesus. Prayerlessness left him unprepared for the moment of testing.

Peter never forgot that night. Years later he wrote, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a**

roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Paul said the same: **"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2).**

What does watching look like in daily life? It means paying attention to your own heart, noticing when bitterness, fear or temptation starts to creep in. It means noticing what is going on in the lives of those around you. It means listening for the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit. One simple question can change your whole day: "Holy Spirit, what are You showing me right now?" Watchful prayer keeps the believer aware of the enemy's schemes and sensitive to the Spirit's leading, so that many of the devil's plans are exposed before they ever grow into visible damage.

For All the Saints

Finally, Paul says we are to pray "for all the saints." Spiritual warfare is never only about me. We do not just pray for our own protection; we cover one another. Remember, there is no armor for the back. Prayer for one another is how we guard each other's backs.

Look at what Paul asks for himself in the very next verse. He was in chains, under guard, facing an uncertain future. You might expect him to ask for release, comfort or an easier road. Instead he asks for this: **"and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."** (Ephesians 6:19-20). He asked them to pray that he would keep advancing, even in prison.

Jesus Himself gave us the greatest example of intercession. On the night before the cross, He told Peter, **"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your**

brethren." (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus did not prevent every test from coming, but He prayed that Peter's faith would survive it. And it did. Peter fell, but he did not fall away.

So pray for your pastor and his family. Pray for missionaries on the front lines. Pray for believers in nations where following Jesus can cost you your life. Pray for your children, your neighbors, your coworkers, the young believer who is still wobbly in the faith. **"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."** (James 5:16). Keep a list if it helps. Let names come to mind during the day and lift them up as they come.

Prayer is what turns the armor from a museum display into active readiness. It plugs in every appliance. It keeps the soldier awake, alert and connected to his Commander. And it reminds us that we never pray from defeat. We pray from the victory Jesus has already won, enforcing it on earth, one prayer at a time.

PART THREE — THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

CHAPTER 12

Prayer in the Heavens: Daniel's Twenty-One Days

Have you ever ordered something online and then watched the tracking page like a hawk? On day one it says "Order received." On day two it says "Shipped." Then, for what feels like forever, it says "In transit." Nothing seems to be happening. You start to wonder if the package got lost, if the company forgot you, or if you should just cancel the whole thing. And then one afternoon there is a knock at the door, and there it is.

Here is the point. The order was received the moment you placed it. The delay in transit did not mean the order had been canceled. It only meant the package was on its way through places you could not see.

Many believers have prayed and then lived in that "in transit" season, wondering if heaven heard them at all. The tenth chapter of Daniel pulls back the curtain on what is happening during that wait. It is one of the most encouraging passages in the whole Bible for anyone who has ever prayed and seen nothing change, at least not yet.

The Man Who Prayed Like It Mattered

Daniel was no beginner in prayer. As a young man he had been carried off to Babylon, and he had spent his whole life serving pagan kings without ever bowing to their gods. Prayer was the backbone of his life. When his enemies passed a law making prayer to anyone but the king illegal, Daniel did not change a

thing. **"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days."** (Daniel 6:10). The lions could not touch him, because the battle had already been won in the secret place.

Now, years later, Daniel is an old man. He has received a troubling vision about the future of his people, and he sets himself to seek God. **"In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."** (Daniel 10:2-3). We will talk more about fasting later in this book. For now, notice his seriousness. Daniel did not toss up a quick prayer and walk away. He set his heart, humbled himself, and kept at it day after day after day.

And for twenty days, as far as Daniel could see, nothing happened.

Heard From the First Day

Then, on the twenty-first day, an angel appeared to him, and the first words out of the angel's mouth are some of the most comforting words in all of Scripture: **"Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words."** (Daniel 10:12).

Read that again slowly. From the first day. Not the tenth day, not the twentieth day, not after Daniel finally prayed hard enough or long enough. From the very first day, heaven heard and heaven acted. "I have come because of your words." Daniel's prayer was the reason the messenger was sent.

This is not a one-time event. Earlier, when Daniel had prayed, the angel Gabriel told him, **"At the beginning of your**

supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved" (Daniel 9:23). At the beginning. The command went out the moment he started praying.

Please let this sink deep into your heart. Being heard and seeing the answer are two different things. When you pray according to the will of God, you are heard immediately. **"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."** (1 John 5:14-15). The answer may still be "in transit," but the order has been received. Your prayer did not bounce off the ceiling. It went straight to the throne.

Resistance in the Unseen Realm

So why did it take three weeks? The angel explains: **"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia."** (Daniel 10:13).

This is extraordinary. The "prince of the kingdom of Persia" was clearly not a human king; no human could hold back an angel. It was a spiritual power of darkness ruling over that nation, exactly the kind of principality Paul describes in Ephesians 6:12. And that power resisted God's messenger until Michael came to help. A battle was being fought in the heavenlies over Daniel's prayer, and Daniel did not know a thing about it.

That should transform the way we think about prayer. Prayer is not just speaking religious words into the air. It is not merely a way to feel better. It is spiritual engagement. When a believer prays according to God's will, humbles himself and persists, something moves in the unseen realm. Prayer can trigger

conflict, mobilize the help of heaven and advance God's purposes against real opposition. The Bible tells us angels are **"ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation"** (Hebrews 1:14), and Daniel 10 shows them at work in answer to prayer.

That means a delayed answer is not evidence that God does not care. Sometimes it is evidence that your prayer has entered a contested arena. The devil does not mind religious activity. But prayer that reaches into God's purposes is a serious problem for his kingdom, so he resists it.

Now let me add some balance, because I do not want anyone running off to blame every delay on demons. Not every wait is a spiritual battle. Sometimes God is simply working on a timetable bigger than ours. **"For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry."** (Habakkuk 2:3). Sometimes God is preparing us for the answer, or preparing the answer for us. And notice something else: Daniel never became fascinated with the prince of Persia. He did not even know the prince existed until the angel told him. He did not spend three weeks studying demons; he spent three weeks seeking God. You do not need to see the battle to win it. You just need to keep praying.

Don't Quit on Day Twenty

Here is a question that has stuck with me for years: what if Daniel had quit on day twenty? What if he had said, "Well, I've tried. Nothing is happening. Heaven must not be listening"? The answer was one day away, and he would never have known it.

How many believers have quit on day twenty? How many have given up on a prodigal child, a marriage, a calling or a nation, just before the breakthrough? Many people pray briefly, see no immediate result and conclude that nothing happened. But Daniel

teaches the opposite. Something had happened from the very first day. Heaven had heard. Action had begun. Resistance had only delayed what could be seen. The right response is not unbelief. It is persistence.

Jesus taught exactly this. **"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart"**

(Luke 18:1). He told of a widow who kept coming to an unjust judge, asking for justice again and again, until the judge finally gave in just to be rid of her. The point is not that God is like that judge. The point is the contrast. If even a crooked judge will respond to persistence, how much more will a loving Father?

"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

(Luke 18:7-8). Notice that last question. The issue is not whether God is faithful. The issue is whether we will keep believing.

Elijah shows us the same thing. After declaring that rain was coming, he prayed on top of Mount Carmel and sent his servant to look toward the sea. **"So he went up and looked, and said, 'There is nothing.' And seven times he said, 'Go again.'"**

(1 Kings 18:43). Six times the report was "nothing." Elijah did not stop. **"Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, 'There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!'"** (1 Kings 18:44). And soon the sky was black with rain.

I think of a mother I will call Ruth, who prayed for her son for eleven years. He had walked away from God and from the family, and for most of those years every report was "nothing." Some well-meaning friends told her she should "release him" and stop praying. She did release him to God, but she did not stop praying for him. One Sunday morning, without warning, he walked into the back of the church where she worshiped and sat

down beside her. Eleven years of "in transit," and then a knock at the door.

Jesus put it simply: **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."**

(Matthew 7:7). The sense is to keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. **"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."** (Galatians 6:9).

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

There is one more thing we must understand, and it changes the whole posture of our prayer. We are not trying to force open a closed heaven by our own strength. We are not trying to twist God's arm. We pray from a position, not toward one. God **"raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:6). Our authority in prayer does not come from emotional intensity or personal merit. It comes from union with Christ.

That is why Jesus taught us to pray this way: **"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven."** (Matthew 6:9-10). That is not a wistful hope. It is a request with authority behind it. Heaven is the pattern; earth is where we enforce it. Is there sickness in heaven? Is there hatred, bondage or despair in heaven? Then we have a right to pray against those things on earth. And Jesus gave us that authority: **"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."** (Matthew 18:18).

So how do we pray when the answer is in transit? Start by settling, from the Word of God, that what you are asking is His will. Faith needs a promise to stand on. Then thank Him that you were heard from the first day; do not keep asking as though He

never heard you the first time. Stand against the resistance in the name of Jesus, refusing to let the enemy hold back what God has released. Keep standing, keep praying and keep praising, day after day. And do not let the calendar preach to you. The number of days that have gone by is not a measure of God's faithfulness.

Prayer is not begging from defeat. It is enforcing from alignment. Daniel's twenty-one days remind us that heaven hears from the first day, that the battle is real, and that the believer who keeps praying will see the answer arrive. So pray with authority, as a son or daughter of God, and keep praying until His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

CHAPTER 13

The Pushback: Why the Enemy Answers Your Prayer First

Have you ever noticed this? You decide that from now on you are going to get up early and pray. The very first morning, the alarm does not go off, the baby is up all night, and you oversleep. Or you finally commit to reading the Bible every day, and suddenly your whole schedule explodes. Or you make a decision to forgive someone, and within twenty-four hours that same person does something that makes you angrier than ever. Or you step out in a new ministry, and the car breaks down, your child gets sick and an old temptation comes back with a vengeance.

You are not imagining things, and you are not being paranoid. It is a pattern that runs all through Scripture. Very often the first response to a prayer, a breakthrough, a decision or a new commitment is not the answer. It is resistance. I call it the pushback. And once you understand it, it will stop scaring you and start encouraging you.

Think about a football game. Nobody tackles the player sitting on the bench. Nobody bothers the fan eating hot dogs in the stands. The defense swarms the one who has the ball and is heading for the goal line. If you are getting hit, it may simply mean you are carrying something valuable and moving in the right direction.

Satan Comes Immediately

Jesus warned us about this in the parable of the sower. He described the word of God as seed sown into hearts, and then He explained what happens next. **"And these are the ones by the**

wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts." (Mark 4:15).

Did you catch that word? Immediately. The devil does not wait a few months to see whether the seed will grow. He comes at once, while the seed is still lying on the surface, before it can take root. Jesus continued: **"These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble."** (Mark 4:16-17).

Look closely at the phrase "for the word's sake." The trouble came because of the word, not in spite of it. The enemy targets the seed. He is not attacking you randomly; he is attacking what God just planted in you. When you receive a fresh word, a new conviction or a fresh step of obedience, you have just been handed something the devil wants to steal. Expect him to try. Paul said, **"lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."** (2 Corinthians 2:11). Knowing this device takes away most of its power.

From the River to the Wilderness

Even Jesus experienced the pushback, and the timing is striking. At His baptism in the Jordan, heaven opened, the Spirit descended like a dove, and the Father spoke: **"Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness."** (Mark 1:11-12).

There is that word again. Immediately. From the highest moment of affirmation straight into forty days of testing. And listen to the first words out of the tempter's mouth: **"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command**

that these stones become bread." (Matthew 4:3). "If You are the Son of God." The Father had just said "You are My beloved Son," and the devil's very first move was to question that word. The pushback aimed straight at what God had just declared.

But notice how Luke describes the beginning and the end of that wilderness season. Jesus went in **"being filled with the Holy Spirit"** (Luke 4:1). He came out like this: **"Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee"** (Luke 4:14). He went in full; He came out in power. The pushback was not a detour from God's plan. It was the road into the next level of His ministry. The same can be true for you.

Bricks Without Straw

One of the clearest pictures of the pushback is the story of Moses' first visit to Pharaoh. God had spoken to Moses at the burning bush. Moses had obeyed, gone back to Egypt and delivered God's message: **"Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'"** (Exodus 5:1).

You would expect the chains to fall off that same afternoon. Instead, things got worse. Much worse. Pharaoh ordered, **"You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves."** (Exodus 5:7). The slaves still had to make the same number of bricks, but now they had to find their own materials. They were beaten when they fell short, and they blamed Moses for everything.

Poor Moses went back to the Lord completely confused. **"Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all."** (Exodus 5:22-23). Have you ever prayed a prayer like that? "Lord, I obeyed You, and it got worse!"

Look at God's answer. He did not apologize, and He did not cancel the plan. **"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.'"** (Exodus 6:1). Now you shall see. Pharaoh's tightening grip was not proof that God had failed. It was proof that Pharaoh's grip was being challenged. Tyrants only squeeze harder when they feel their hold slipping. The first result of obedience may look like failure, but it is often the enemy's panic.

Walls, Mockers and Distractions

Nehemiah faced the pushback the moment he began rebuilding the broken walls of Jerusalem. **"But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews."**

(Nehemiah 4:1). First came mockery. Then came threats of attack. Then came discouragement from inside the camp, as some of the workers said the rubble was too much and their strength was failing. Then came distraction, as his enemies kept inviting him to "meetings" designed to lure him away and harm him.

The enemy uses the same playbook today. Mockery: "Who do you think you are?" Threats: "This is going to cost you." Discouragement: "It is too much; you'll never finish." Distraction: "Come down here and deal with this instead."

Look at how Nehemiah stood. He prayed and he stayed alert: **"Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night."** (Nehemiah 4:9). He encouraged the people: **"Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."** (Nehemiah 4:14). He armed the builders: **"with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other**

held a weapon." (Nehemiah 4:17). And he refused to be distracted: **"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3).**

And the result? **"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God."**

(Nehemiah 6:15-16). The pushback did not stop the wall. It only made God's victory more obvious.

Doors Open, Adversaries Gather

In Acts 16, Paul received a clear direction from God: **"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'"** (Acts 16:9). He obeyed. In Philippi, a businesswoman named Lydia opened her heart to the Lord, and her whole household was baptized. A church was born. It was a wonderful start.

Then came the pushback. A slave girl with a spirit of divination began following them around. Paul cast the spirit out, her owners lost their income, and within hours Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates, beaten with rods and locked in the inner prison with their feet in stocks. Right in the center of God's will, they ended up bleeding in a dungeon. What they did at midnight belongs to the chapter on praise, but for now notice this: the attack came precisely because the door had opened. Paul later wrote, **"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."** (1 Corinthians 16:9). Open doors and adversaries tend to arrive together.

Jesus told us the enemy's agenda plainly: **"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come**

that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). Think about it. Thieves do not break into empty houses. They go where the valuables are. If the enemy is working hard to steal something from you, it may be because God has just put something precious in your hands.

How to Stand Through the Pushback

So what do we do when the pushback comes? First, do not mistake it for failure, and do not mistake it for God's "no." Peter wrote, **"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you"** (1 Peter 4:12). It is not strange. It is normal for anyone moving forward in God.

Second, submit and resist, in that order. **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7). Submission comes first. Bring the situation to God, make sure your heart is right, and then stand against the enemy in the name of Jesus. Do not argue with him; tell him plainly that he is at the wrong address.

Third, keep your commitment. If you decided to pray in the morning and the first morning went wrong, get up the next morning and pray. If you decided to forgive and the person provoked you, forgive again. The pushback is designed to make you quit on the first day. Do not give it that satisfaction.

Fourth, stand. **"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."** (Ephesians 6:13). Sometimes you have prayed everything you know to pray, confessed every promise you know to confess, and there is nothing left to do but stand your ground. That is not weakness. That is victory in progress. **"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after**

you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise"
(Hebrews 10:35-36).

A word of balance here, too. Not every difficulty is the devil. Sometimes our troubles come from our own poor choices, and sometimes life in a fallen world is simply hard. Ask the Lord for wisdom, deal honestly with anything that is yours to fix, and avoid making big decisions in the heat of the pressure. Tell a trusted brother or sister what you are facing, so you are not standing alone.

A man I will call Thomas once started a small Bible study in his living room. The week before the first meeting, his car broke down, his boss asked him to work late on the very night of the study, and he and his wife had their worst argument in years. He almost canceled. Instead, he and his wife sat down, prayed together, apologized to each other, and said out loud, "Devil, you are not stopping this." Six people came that first night. Two of them gave their lives to Christ within a month.

The pushback is real, but it is not the final word. Remember: we do not fight for victory; we fight from victory. The enemy answers first because he is afraid of what God is about to do. Stand your ground, keep your commitment, and watch what the Lord does next. Now you shall see.

CHAPTER 14

Fasting: When "This Kind" Will Not Go

It must have been one of the most embarrassing afternoons of the disciples' lives. While Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter, James and John, a desperate father brought his tormented son to the other disciples. The boy was in terrible danger; a spirit kept throwing him into fire and water. The disciples had cast out demons before. So they tried. And nothing happened. When Jesus came down, He set the boy free with a word. Later, alone with Him, the disciples asked the question that had been burning inside them.

The Day the Disciples Came Up Short

"Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.'" (Matthew 17:19-21). Mark records the same answer: "So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.'" (Mark 9:29)

Notice what Jesus did not say. He did not say, "You did not have enough authority." They did. Jesus had given them authority over unclean spirits, as we will see in the chapter on deliverance. He did not say, "The devil was stronger than God." He pointed to two things: unbelief, and "this kind."

The problem was not on God's side. It was on theirs. Their faith had been shaken by what they were seeing. The boy's condition was severe, the crowd was watching, the father was crying, and their confidence drained away. Jesus said some situations, some kinds of stubborn darkness, require a believer whose heart is tuned to God through prayer and fasting. Fasting did not give them more authority. It would have dealt with the unbelief that kept them from using the authority they already had.

Some battles will not yield to a quick prayer tossed up on the run. For "this kind," Jesus points us to a weapon that many believers have quietly left in the closet.

Not If, but When

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about three things every disciple does: giving, praying and fasting. And He used the same little word for all three. "When you give." "When you pray." And then: **"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to be fasting to men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."** (Matthew 6:16-18).

Jesus did not say "if you fast." He said "when." He assumed His followers would fast just as naturally as they would pray and give. When people asked why His disciples were not fasting while He was with them, He answered, **"Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."** (Matthew 9:15). Those days are now. The Bridegroom has ascended to heaven, and His bride is waiting and watching for His return.

Jesus Himself fasted before He began His public ministry. **"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."** (Matthew 4:2). And as we saw in the last chapter, He came out of that wilderness in the power of the Spirit.

Yet in some contemporary churches, fasting is treated as an old-fashioned relic, or as something only for extreme people. Many sincere believers have never fasted a single meal, simply because nobody taught them. That is a real loss, because Jesus expected it and promised the Father would reward it.

Fasting Does Not Twist God's Arm

Now, before we go any further, we have to clear away a serious misunderstanding. Fasting is not a hunger strike against heaven. It is not a way of pressuring God, as if we could say, "I will not eat until You give me what I want." God is not a reluctant official who needs to be squeezed. He is a good Father who already loves you. And fasting does not earn anything. The Pharisee in Jesus' parable bragged, **"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."** (Luke 18:12). He fasted faithfully and went home unjustified. Fasting that becomes a badge of pride is worse than useless.

So what does fasting do? It does not change God. It tunes the believer. Think of an old radio with a dial. The station is always broadcasting, but if the dial is slightly off, all you hear is static. Fasting turns down the static of the flesh so that you can hear the station clearly. When you say no to your stomach for a time, you are telling your body that it is not in charge. Paul said, **"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."** (1 Corinthians 9:27). Fasting puts the body back in its place, under the spirit, where it belongs.

Jesus once told His disciples, **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."** (John 4:34). Fasting is a way of practicing that truth. Every hunger pang becomes a reminder: "I need God more than I need this meal." And as your appetite for food quiets down, your appetite for God grows sharper. Faith rises. Unbelief loses its grip. You begin to see "this kind" the way God sees it: small before His power.

God also tells us what kind of fast He actually wants. In Isaiah's day, the people were complaining that they had fasted and God had not noticed. God's answer was blunt: they were fasting while mistreating their workers, quarreling and fighting. Their fast was a religious show. Then He described the real thing. **"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?"** (Isaiah 58:6). Did you see the warfare language there? Loosing bonds. Breaking yokes. Setting the oppressed free. That is what God's fast is for.

And it is never separated from love for people. **"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?"** (Isaiah 58:7). The meal you skip can become a meal you give. And look at the promise that follows: **"Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard."** (Isaiah 58:8). God's call has not changed: **"Now, therefore,' says the LORD, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.'"** (Joel 2:12). Fasting is about turning your whole heart toward Him.

When God's People Fasted

The Bible is full of moments when God's people fasted and God moved. Let me show you three, because each one shows a different purpose.

The first is Esther, and her fast was for deliverance. An evil man named Haman had arranged a decree to wipe out the entire Jewish people. Esther was queen, but going to the king uninvited could cost her life. Before she did anything, she called a fast.

"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

(Esther 4:16). On the third day, she walked into the throne room, received favor, and the whole plot was turned upside down. Haman fell, and God's people were saved.

The second is Ezra, and his fast was for protection and direction. He was leading families back to Jerusalem with gold and silver for the temple, across bandit-ridden roads, and he was ashamed to ask the king for an escort after boasting of God's protection.

So he did this: **"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions."** (Ezra 8:21). And the result? **"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."** (Ezra 8:23). They arrived safely, every family and every ounce of treasure accounted for.

The third is the church at Antioch, and their fast was for sending.

"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3).

The first great missionary journey, which began carrying the gospel out across the Roman world, was born in a prayer meeting

where people were fasting. I have often thought that some of the greatest advances of the kingdom began with hungry people who wanted God more than lunch.

Fasting Wisely and Safely

Now let us make this practical. There are several ways to fast, and you do not need to start with forty days. Please do not. Start where you are.

A normal fast means going without food for a set time while still drinking water. You might begin by skipping one meal and spending that time in prayer and the Word. Then perhaps a whole day, from one evening to the next. A partial fast means giving up certain foods rather than all food, the way Daniel did for three weeks: **"I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth"** (Daniel 10:3). Many believers find this a wonderful way to seek God over a longer season. Setting aside television or social media for a season can be a real blessing too, though it is not quite the same as the fasting Jesus described.

Here is something very important. Your health matters to God. If you have diabetes, heart trouble, a pregnancy, are nursing, are elderly or frail, take regular medication, or have ever struggled with an eating disorder, please talk with your doctor before you fast from food. Never stop taking prescribed medication in order to fast. Seeking God and seeing a doctor are not rivals; they are both ways of honoring the body God gave you. And if a food fast is not wise for you, a partial fast or another form of setting yourself apart can still be a sincere offering to the Lord. God looks at the heart.

A few other practical tips. Go in with a purpose: write down what you are seeking God about. Replace mealtimes with time in the Word and prayer, otherwise you are just hungry, not fasting. Drink plenty of water. Expect your stomach to preach a loud sermon around eleven in the morning; that is just your flesh

complaining. Expect some pushback too, so be gentle with the people around you. Keep it quiet, as Jesus said; this is between you and your Father. And when you finish, break your fast gently with something light, especially after a longer fast.

When This Kind Must Go

So what is the "this kind" in your life? A situation that has refused to move? A loved one in bondage? A family pattern repeating through the generations?

The answer is not to give up, and it is not to conclude that the devil is stronger than Jesus. He is not. The cross settled that. The answer may be to go deeper. To set aside a day, or three, and seek God with prayer and fasting until your faith rises to meet the promise. Fasting will not make God love you more, and it will not make Him more willing. But it will make you more ready. It will sharpen your spiritual hearing, starve your unbelief and bring your body under the rule of your spirit.

The disciples learned that day at the foot of the mountain that authority alone was not enough; they needed hearts tuned to God. The same is true for us. So when the battle is stubborn and "this kind" will not go, do not quit. Push the plate away for a while. Turn your whole heart toward God. And watch what He does when His people want Him more than their next meal.

CHAPTER 15

The Words of the Warrior: Authority Is Voice-Activated

Have you noticed how many modern gadgets wait for your voice? You walk into a room and say, “Lights on,” and the lights come on. The wiring was installed and the electricity was paid for all along. But nothing happened until somebody spoke.

The authority Christ won for you at the cross is real, it is paid for, and it is wired into your life by the Holy Spirit. But a great deal of it is voice-activated. God made a world by speaking, and He has made sons and daughters who are meant to speak like Him. Listen to a believer talk for ten minutes, and his mouth will tell you whether he is living under the enemy or on top of him.

We have already seen that the mind is a battlefield. A thought is a seed; a word is that seed planted in the ground. And Jesus put it plainly: **“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”** (Matthew 12:34) What fills you will eventually come out of you. The question is whether it will come out as a weapon for the kingdom or a weapon against yourself.

The Little Rudder on the Big Ship

James wrote one of the most practical passages in the whole Bible about the tongue, and he used pictures any child could understand. Listen to him: **“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder**

wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!” (James 3:2-5)

A little piece of metal decides where a thousand-pound horse goes. A small rudder below the waterline decides where an enormous ship ends up. James is telling us that your tongue is the rudder of your life. If your thoughts are the coordinates you set in the GPS, your words are the steering wheel that actually turns the vessel. Many believers steer straight into the rocks with their own mouths and then pray for God to rescue them from the shipwreck. But if the rudder can steer you wrong, it can also steer you right. The storm is real. But the rudder is in your hand.

James goes on: **“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”** (James 3:6) Notice where the fire comes from.

A tongue can be lit by hell. That means the enemy wants to borrow your mouth. He is the accuser, the liar, the slanderer, and he does not have a body on earth of his own. So he looks for one. Every time a Christian speaks fear, accusation, gossip, or unbelief, the devil is getting free airtime. Wrong address, devil. My mouth belongs to the King.

Death and Life Are on the Table

Solomon said it even more bluntly: **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”** (Proverbs 18:21) You will eat the fruit of your words. What you say today, you will be having for dinner next month.

Jesus took this even further. **“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”** (Matthew 12:36-37)

The word “idle” means careless, lazy, thrown away. Jesus is

saying there is no such thing as a throwaway word. The joke that cuts someone down, the sigh that says “nothing ever works out for me,” the offhand remark that “this cold always turns into the flu with me” — none of it is idle in heaven’s accounting.

This is not a call to fear your own mouth. God is a Father, not a trap-setter. It is a call to wake up and use a weapon of tremendous power on purpose. Look at how salvation itself works. Paul wrote, **“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”** (Romans 10:8-10) The greatest transfer in the universe, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s Son, involved two things working together: a believing heart and a confessing mouth. If the mouth matters that much at the front door of the kingdom, do you think it suddenly stops mattering once you are inside the house?

How Ground Is Lost One Sentence at a Time

The enemy rarely steals ground in one dramatic battle. He collects it a sentence at a time, in four common ways.

The first is complaining. Israel came out of Egypt with God’s cloud overhead and manna on the ground every morning, and they complained about the food, the water, the leadership, and the route. When ten spies said, in effect, “We are like grasshoppers next to those giants,” God’s answer was sobering: **“Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you.’”** (Numbers 14:28) They got exactly what they kept saying. A whole generation wandered and died in the wilderness, not because God could not bring them in, but because they talked themselves out. Paul later

warned the church not to **“complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”**

(1 Corinthians 10:10) And to us he said simply, **“Do all things without complaining and disputing.”** (Philippians 2:14)

The second is agreeing with the enemy. The devil whispers, “You will never change.” And instead of answering with the Word, we repeat it out loud. “I guess I’ll always be this way.” He whispers, “Your children will never come back to God.” And we tell our friends, “I don’t think my son will ever come around.” We think we are just being honest. But we are signing our name to the enemy’s report. Every time you say what he says, you have taken his side in the argument.

The third is careless vows and rash words. **“You are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth.”** (Proverbs 6:2) “I will never forgive him.” “I’ll never trust anybody again.” Those are not harmless outbursts. They are little prisons we build with our own breath. Scripture counsels, **“Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:2) If you have spoken words like that, the answer is simple: take them back before the Lord. Renounce them out loud. What the mouth bound, the mouth can loose.

The fourth is gossip. Gossip is spiritual arson. It sets fires in families, workplaces, and churches, and then everybody wonders where the smoke came from. **“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.”** (Proverbs 26:20) The enemy loves a good rumor because it divides the ranks. And remember, there is no armor for the back. When believers wound one another with their mouths, they are doing the devil’s work for him at no charge. Paul gave us the filter: **“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”** (Ephesians 4:29)

I knew a man I will call Marcus who used to say, almost every week, “I’ll never get out of debt.” One day a friend gently asked him, “Do you realize you are prophesying over your own bank account?” It stopped him cold. He did not deny the debt, but he refused to crown it king. He started saying, “My God shall supply all my need, and I am learning to steward what He gives me.” His decisions changed, and over the next few years the debt went down. The rudder had turned the ship.

Speaking to the Mountain

One morning Jesus walked up to a fig tree that was full of leaves but had no fruit. He spoke to it. He did not pray about it, He did not discuss it with the disciples, He spoke directly to the tree. The next day Peter saw it and said, **“Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.”** (Mark 11:21) And Jesus used that moment to teach them one of the most remarkable truths in the Bible: “So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.’” (Mark 11:22-23)

Notice three things. First, it begins with God. This is not positive thinking; your words have authority because they are rooted in His Word and spoken in His name. Second, Jesus said to speak to the mountain, not about it. Most of us are experts at describing our mountains to our friends. Jesus said, talk to it. Third, the word “says” appears three times in that one verse. The mouth is involved.

What are your mountains? A fear, a habit, a sickness, a heaviness, a door that will not open. Bring these to the Father in prayer. And by all means, when sickness is involved, go to the doctor and take the treatment; seeking God and seeing a physician are not rivals. But there also comes a time to stand up as a son and speak

to the thing itself in the name of Jesus. “Fear, I refuse you. You have no place in my house.” “Heaviness, lift off my mind in Jesus’ name.” That is not shouting at the sky. That is enforcing a victory that has already been won.

Paul said that real faith always finds its voice. **“And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.”** (2 Corinthians 4:13) Faith that never opens its mouth is like a sword that never leaves its sheath. It is real steel, but the enemy is not worried about it.

Holding Fast the Confession

Here is where many believers stumble. They speak the Word once, nothing seems to change by Thursday, and they go back to saying what they used to say. But Scripture tells us, **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”** (Hebrews 10:23) The word “confession” simply means saying the same thing as God. You hold fast to it. You do not let go when the wind blows. You keep the rudder steady even when the waves are high.

This is not denial. Faith simply gives God’s Word the final say over the facts. You can say, “The bank balance is low, and my God is my supplier.” You can say, “The symptoms are real, and by His stripes I am healed, and I am trusting Him as I follow my doctor’s care.” You can say, “My son is far from God right now, and I believe he will come home.” That is honest, and it is faith-filled.

So how do you train your mouth? Start by setting a guard. David prayed, **“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”** (Psalm 141:3) Ask the Holy Spirit to tap you on the shoulder when you are about to agree with the enemy. Next, replace rather than just remove. Find the promise that fits your situation and speak it out loud every day. **“Let the**

weak say, ‘I am strong.’” (Joel 3:10) Then watch your language in the small moments: in the car, at the kitchen sink, under your breath. That is where the rudder really turns.

Finally, be patient with yourself. James said we all stumble in word. When you slip, just correct course: “Lord, I take that back. That is not what You say about me.” Then say what He says.

Your words are not decorations. They are the steering wheel of your life and the sword in your hand. The devil would love for you to keep that sword sheathed, or worse, to keep swinging it at yourself. But you belong to the King. Open your mouth and agree with heaven.

CHAPTER 16

Praise as a Weapon of War

Most people think of praise as the thing you do after the battle is over. The team wins the championship, and the fans pour onto the field cheering. The diagnosis comes back clear, and the family throws a party. The job offer arrives, and you call everyone you know. That kind of praise is wonderful, and God loves it. But the Bible reveals something much more surprising. Praise is not only a celebration after victory. It is one of the ways victory is enforced.

In other words, praise is not just the parade. It is the artillery.

That may sound strange if you grew up thinking of worship as the warm-up before the sermon, the twenty minutes of songs while latecomers find their seats. But when you open the Scriptures, you find armies going into battle led by singers, prison doors shaking open in the middle of a hymn, and enemies being silenced by the praise of little children. Praise has teeth. And the believer who learns to use it becomes very difficult for the enemy to keep down.

The Accuser Has Met His Answer

To understand why praise is so powerful, you have to understand one of the devil's favorite operations. The book of Revelation calls him by a very specific title: **“for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.”** (Revelation 12:10) Day and night, he talks. He accuses you to God, he accuses God to you, and he accuses you to yourself. “You failed again.” “God is not listening.” “Look at your life; is this what a child of God looks

like?” Accusation produces guilt, shame, heaviness, and a slow inward collapse. Its goal is to make you go silent.

Praise is the answer to accusation. When you praise, you are lifting your soul into agreement with God’s greatness, His goodness, and His victory. You are saying out loud what heaven says about Him and about what He has done. The accuser says, “You are finished.” Praise says, “My God is faithful, and His mercy endures forever.” Praise does not deny the battle. It changes the climate the battle is fought in.

David understood this. He wrote, **“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.”** (Psalm 8:2) Think about that. God did not choose generals or philosophers to silence His enemies. He chose babies. Simple, wholehearted praise from the weakest voices in the room has the strength to shut the mouth of the avenger. When the children in the temple shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and the religious leaders were offended, Jesus quoted this very psalm back to them: **“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise.”** (Matthew 21:16) Praise and strength are tied together. When you praise, you are not being weak and emotional. You are being strong in the way God defines strength.

Putting On the Garment

One of the most beautiful promises in the prophets describes what the Messiah would come to do. He would come **“to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”** (Isaiah 61:3)

Notice that praise is called a garment. A garment is something you put on. Nobody wakes up in the morning and finds that their clothes have jumped onto their body by themselves. You have to reach for them. You have to decide. In the same way, the garment of praise is not something that falls on you when you happen to feel good. It is something you choose to put on, especially on the mornings when something else is trying to dress you.

And what is it replacing? A spirit of heaviness. Many of us know that feeling. It sits on the chest like a wet blanket. It drains color out of the day. It makes prayer feel like lifting weights. Now let me be careful here, because some heaviness has physical roots, and depression is a real condition that often needs medical help. If that is your situation, please see your doctor and take the help God has made available; praise and medicine are not enemies. But I can tell you from decades of walking with people through dark seasons that there is also a spiritual heaviness that presses on God's people, and praise is one of the main ways to throw it off. You praise your way back into agreement with God.

David talked to his own soul about this: **“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”** (Psalm 42:5) David did not wait for his feelings to cooperate. He told his feelings what to do. “I shall yet praise Him.” That is the language of a warrior who refuses to let heaviness have the last word.

When Judah Sent the Choir First

There is no better picture of praise as a weapon than what happened in the days of King Jehoshaphat. A massive coalition of armies, Moab, Ammon, and others from Mount Seir, came against Judah. It was more than the little nation could possibly handle. Jehoshaphat did the right thing first: he called the whole nation to seek the Lord. And his prayer is one of the most honest

prayers in the Bible: **“nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”** (2 Chronicles 20:12)

God answered through a prophet: **“Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”** (2 Chronicles 20:15) The next morning Jehoshaphat did something no military academy would ever teach. He appointed singers to go out ahead of the army. Not the archers. Not the swordsmen. The choir. And they marched out singing, **“Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever.”** (2 Chronicles 20:21)

Here is what happened next: **“Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.”** (2 Chronicles 20:22) Do not miss the timing. When they began to sing. Not when they finished. Not after the battle had turned. The moment praise was released, God moved. The enemy armies turned on each other, and by the time Judah reached the watchtower, there was nothing left to fight.

And then comes the part that belongs in a book called *The Spoils of War*: **“When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much.”** (2 Chronicles 20:25) They went out singing and came back carrying more than they could hold. That is what praise does. It turns a threat into a harvest. It is one of the ways we walk out and pick up what the Lord has already won.

They even named the place afterward. They called it the Valley of Berachah, which means the Valley of Blessing. The valley that was supposed to be their grave became the place of their blessing, and the turning point was praise.

Midnight in the Philippian Jail

Fast forward to the New Testament. Paul and Silas have just set a young girl free from a spirit of divination in the city of Philippi. Her owners are furious because they have lost their income. The two missionaries are dragged before the magistrates, stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into the inner prison with their feet locked in stocks. Their backs are bleeding. It is dark. It is cold. There is every reason in the world to complain.

And this is what the Bible records: **“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.”** (Acts 16:25-26)

Midnight is the darkest hour. It is the hour when pain feels the sharpest and hope feels the farthest away. That is exactly when they sang. And look at the result. Their own chains fell off, but so did everyone else’s. When you praise in your midnight, it does not only affect you. The other prisoners were listening. Your children are listening. Your coworkers are listening. And when the foundations shake, other people’s chains come loose too. Before the night was over, the jailer and his whole household had been saved.

I once knew a widow I will call Ruth. Her husband died suddenly, and within the same year she faced a serious illness of her own. She followed her treatment faithfully, and she also did something that puzzled some of her friends. Every evening she would put on worship music and sing along, sometimes through tears, in the little kitchen where she and her husband used to eat. She told me later, “I could not change what was happening to me. But I could change what was happening in that kitchen.” The grief was real. But heaviness did not get to move in and set up

house. Her home became a place where people came to be encouraged instead of the other way around.

The Sacrifice That Costs Something

The writer of Hebrews gives us a phrase that should shape all our praise: **“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”** (Hebrews 13:15) A sacrifice costs something. Praise is easy when you feel like it. It becomes a sacrifice when you do not. And that is often when it is the most powerful.

Notice too that it is “the fruit of our lips.” Praise is meant to be spoken and sung, not only felt. Praise that stays silently in the heart may be sincere, but spoken praise has a distinct place in warfare. The enemy uses mouths for accusation, lies, and unclean speech. God answers by calling His people to fill their mouths with thanksgiving. **“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”** (Psalm 34:1) Notice where David kept it: in his mouth.

The psalmist even paints praise and the sword side by side: **“Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!”** (Psalm 149:6-9) Praise in the mouth, the Word in the hand. That is the warrior’s posture. We do not use these words to fight people; our battle is not against flesh and blood. We use them to bind the spiritual powers that hold people captive, executing the judgment that was already written at the cross. And the psalm says this honor belongs to all His saints. Not just the worship leader. All of us.

Praise also does something inside us. In warfare, a believer who becomes obsessed with his own weakness or the apparent size of the enemy weakens quickly. Praise re-centers the soul on God. It shifts your attention from the pressure of the conflict to the majesty of the Commander. And in that shift, something breaks. Heaviness loses its breath. Fear loses its grip. Accusation loses volume.

So how do you make praise a weapon in daily life? Start the day with it, before the news and the email get a word in. **“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.”** (Psalm 100:4) When pressure rises during the day, answer it with a sentence of praise, even under your breath. When accusation comes, thank God out loud for the blood of Jesus. When you do not know what to do, do what Jehoshaphat did: keep your eyes on Him and send the singers out first. **“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Not for everything, but in everything.

Praise is not decoration in the believer’s arsenal. It establishes strength, it silences the accuser, it shakes prison foundations, and it sends God’s people home carrying spoil. Put on the garment. Open your mouth. The battle is the Lord’s, and He loves to fight it to the sound of His people’s praise.

CHAPTER 17

Preaching the Word and Breaking Strongholds

When most people hear the word “preaching,” they picture a man in a suit behind a wooden pulpit on Sunday morning. That is one kind of preaching, and thank God for faithful pastors who open the Word week after week. But if that is the only picture you have, you will miss something vital. In the Bible, preaching is not primarily a church activity. It is a battlefield activity. And every believer has been handed the weapon.

Preaching simply means proclaiming. It means taking what God has said and saying it out loud to people who need to hear it. It is not sharing human philosophy, political opinions, or clever motivational talks. It is releasing the Word of God into the world. And when that Word goes out, something happens in the spirit. Strongholds crack. Minds that were locked begin to open. Darkness that has been comfortable for years suddenly gets nervous.

We have already seen that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. In this chapter we are going to see what happens when that sword is taken out into the streets.

The Power Is in the Message

Paul made a statement that every believer should know by heart: **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”** (Romans 1:16) Notice that Paul did not say the gospel contains power or points to power. He said it is the power of God. The message itself carries the force.

When you speak the gospel, you are not just passing along religious information. You are releasing something that redeems.

That is why the church does not break darkness by becoming clever, trendy, or merely relevant. It breaks darkness by faithfully proclaiming what God has said. God Himself describes His Word this way: “Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, **“And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”**

(Jeremiah 23:29) A stronghold is a rock. It is a lie that has hardened over years of repetition. Your arguments may bounce off it. Your good intentions may slide right past it. But the Word of God is a hammer, and rocks break when it hits them.

God also promises that His Word will not be wasted: **“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”** (Isaiah 55:11)

That is tremendous encouragement for anyone who has ever shared the gospel and seen no immediate response. The Word you spoke did not evaporate. It went somewhere. It is doing something. Seeds planted in winter may not show above the ground for months, but they are working.

This also explains why the message matters so much. If faith comes by hearing, then what people hear determines what they can believe. **“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Romans 10:14) And again, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** (Romans 10:17) Not by hearing opinions, not by hearing inspirational stories, but by hearing the Word.

What Happened in Ephesus

If you want to see what preaching does to a city held by darkness, look at Ephesus. It was one of the great cities of the

ancient world, and it was soaked in idolatry and the occult. The temple of the goddess Diana dominated the skyline. Magic, spells, and charms were big business. If there was ever a city with a principality sitting over it, Ephesus was the one.

Paul arrived and did something very simple. He preached. **“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 19:8) When the resistance grew there, he moved to a lecture hall and kept going, day after day. **“And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”** (Acts 19:10) Two years of steady, bold, daily proclamation. Not one big event. A relentless flow of truth.

And look what happened to the strongholds: **“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”** (Acts 19:18-20)

Fifty thousand pieces of silver was a fortune. People bound by the occult publicly burned their spell books. Nobody passed a law. The Word was preached, and the Word did what no human campaign could do. It exposed hidden evil, broke occult domination, and brought public repentance. The phrase at the end says it all: the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. It won. Darkness may resist the Word, but it cannot remain undisturbed forever. It is forced into the open.

Soon the silversmiths who made shrines for Diana started a riot because their business was collapsing. Faithful preaching eventually touches the economy of darkness, and the uproar tells you the sword is cutting.

Every Believer a Proclaimer

Here is the part many Christians would rather skip. Preaching is not only for pulpits, and preachers are not only those who come out of seminaries. When persecution scattered the early church out of Jerusalem, the apostles actually stayed behind. Look who did the preaching: **“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”** (Acts 8:4) Ordinary believers. Shopkeepers, mothers, fishermen, servants. They went everywhere, and wherever they went, they preached.

Paul told Timothy, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** (2 Timothy 4:2) In season and out of season means when it is convenient and when it is not, when people are welcoming and when they are hostile, when you feel like it and when you do not. That is the soldier ready to deploy truth at any moment.

Parents preach when they speak Scripture to their children at the breakfast table. Employees preach when a coworker going through a divorce asks why they seem so steady, and they answer with the hope of Jesus. Friends preach when they pray for someone in the parking lot and tell them that God loves them. Peter put it this way: **“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”** (1 Peter 3:15) The decisive issue is not the size of the platform. It is whether the Word of God is being brought out into the open.

“But I am not qualified,” someone says. Wonderful. You are exactly the kind of person God loves to use. **“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”** (1 Corinthians 1:21) And then Paul tells us who God chooses for the job: **“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the**

wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28) That is the upside-down logic of the kingdom. God takes ordinary people like you and me and uses us to shame the mighty. He keeps the cookies on the lower shelf so everyone can reach them.

Boldness Is a Gift You Can Ask For

After Peter and John healed a lame man at the temple gate, they were arrested and hauled before the most powerful religious council in the nation. And this is what the council noticed: **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”** (Acts 4:13)

Their boldness was not a personality trait. Peter, remember, was the same man who denied Jesus to a servant girl by a fire. Their boldness was the overflow of having been with Jesus and of being filled with His Spirit. And when they were released with orders to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, they did not hold a meeting about how to tone it down. They prayed: **“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”** (Acts 4:29-30)

They did not ask for safety. They asked for boldness. And look at God’s answer: **“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”** (Acts 4:31) That means boldness is something you can ask for. If you are timid, you do not have to stay timid.

Ask the Father to fill you afresh and to give you courage to open your mouth. He answered that prayer in Jerusalem, and He still answers it today.

I think of a young woman I will call Hannah, painfully shy, who asked God for exactly that. A few days later a coworker sat down beside her at lunch and started crying about her family. Hannah's heart was pounding, but she quietly said, "Can I tell you what Jesus has done for me?" She stumbled over her words. She forgot half of what she meant to say. But the coworker came to church with her that Sunday, and within a year she had given her life to Christ. Boldness does not mean you stop shaking. It means you speak anyway.

The Great Commission Is Not the Great Suggestion

Jesus did not leave His church with a polite recommendation. He gave an order: **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19-20) This is the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. A soldier does not receive orders from his commander and then decide whether he is in the mood to follow them.

And that brings us to a hard but necessary word. In some contemporary churches, the sword has been quietly laid down. The message has been trimmed so it will not offend anyone. Sin is rarely named. Repentance is seldom mentioned. The cross is spoken of as an inspiration rather than a substitution. Hell has vanished, and holiness has been replaced with self-improvement. Paul saw this coming: **"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for**

themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

When preaching is diluted to please resistant hearers, we are not merely changing style. We are dropping the sword in the middle of the battle. A watered-down message cannot break a stronghold, because the strength that breaks it is in the very truth that has been watered down. Paul refused that path: **“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”**

(Acts 20:27) And he asked the question every preacher, and every believer, must answer: **“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”** (Galatians 1:10)

This does not mean we become harsh. We are called to speak **“the truth in love”** (Ephesians 4:15). Love without truth is just sentiment, and truth without love is just a club. But the answer to a harsh message is not a hollow one. It is the whole truth, spoken with a whole heart.

So pick up the sword. You do not need a pulpit. You need a mouth, a heart full of the Word, and the willingness to open your lips when the Holy Spirit nudges you. The world does not need quieter Christians. It needs believers who will speak truth with courage, clarity, and compassion, and who will watch the Word of the Lord grow mightily and prevail.

CHAPTER 18

The Word of Their Testimony

A courtroom can be full of lawyers making clever arguments, but sometimes the whole case turns when one ordinary person walks to the witness stand and says, “I was there. I saw it. This is what happened.” No theory can stand against a credible eyewitness. The arguments go quiet. The jury leans in. Everybody knows that a real story told by someone who lived it carries a weight that speeches cannot match.

God designed the kingdom to work the same way. Preaching presents the Word directly. Testimony confirms that the Word works. And the Bible tells us that testimony is not just a sweet addition to church life. It is a weapon that overcomes the devil himself.

Overcomers Have Something to Say

Revelation 12 pulls back the curtain on the great conflict between heaven and the accuser. And at the climax of that chapter we read how ordinary believers won: **“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”** (Revelation 12:11)

We spent time in an earlier chapter on the blood of the Lamb, the legal ground of every claim we make. I will not re-teach it here. But notice that the blood does not stand alone in this verse. It is joined by something that comes out of the believer’s mouth: the word of their testimony. The blood is what Christ did. The testimony is us saying so. The blood establishes the victory in heaven’s court. The testimony announces it on earth.

Think about how that works in practice. Satan says, “Guilty.” The blood says, “Forgiven,” and your testimony says, “I have been forgiven.” Satan says, “Defiled.” The blood says, “Cleansed,” and your testimony says, “I have been washed clean.” Satan says, “Rejected.” The blood says, “Accepted in the Beloved,” and your testimony says, “I belong to Him.” Testimony is the believer putting his own name on what the blood has accomplished and saying it out loud where the enemy can hear.

That is why testimony carries force. It is not abstract. It is embodied. It tells darkness, “What you said was impossible has actually happened to me. I am the proof that Christ has won.” Long ago the psalmist put it simply: **“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”** (Psalm 107:2) If you are redeemed, say so. Silence is not humility. It is a weapon left in the sheath.

You Are a Witness Whether You Feel Qualified or Not

Just before Jesus ascended, He gave His disciples a promise and a job description: **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8) He did not say, “You shall be debaters,” or “You shall be scholars.” He said witnesses. A witness is simply someone who has seen, heard, and personally encountered something worth telling.

The early church did not spread across the Roman world because a few trained professionals traveled around giving lectures. It spread because ordinary believers kept telling people what Jesus had done for them. When the authorities ordered Peter and John to be quiet, they answered, **“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”** (Acts 4:20) John later wrote, **“that which we have seen and heard we declare to**

you.” (1 John 1:3) That is the heartbeat of testimony. We are not inventing anything. We are reporting.

My favorite witness in the Gospels is a man who had been born blind. Jesus put mud on his eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and he came back seeing. The religious leaders were furious, because it happened on the Sabbath. They interrogated him, they interrogated his parents, and then they interrogated him again, trying to get him to say something bad about Jesus. They said, “We know that this Man is a sinner.” And this newly sighted man gave one of the greatest answers in history: **“He answered and said, ‘Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.’”**

(John 9:25)

He did not have a theology degree. He could not answer every question they threw at him. But he had one thing they could not argue with. He had been blind, and now he could see. All their learning fell silent in front of one honest testimony. You may not be able to explain the doctrine of the Trinity or answer every objection a skeptic raises. That is fine. You can say, “I do not know everything, but I know what He did for me.”

Look at the man Jesus delivered from a legion of demons among the tombs. When he begged to travel with Jesus, the Lord said no and gave him a different assignment: **“Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”** (Mark 5:19) And Scripture says, **“And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.”**

(Mark 5:20) A whole region of ten cities heard about Jesus through one delivered man’s story. Or think of the Samaritan woman at the well. She went back into her town, and **“many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’”** (John 4:39) Her past had been the talk of the town for all

the wrong reasons. Now her testimony became the talk of the town for the right one.

Testimony Strengthens the One Who Tells It

Testimony does two wonderful things. First, it convinces the listener that light is stronger than darkness and truth is stronger than lies. Second, and we often miss this, it confirms the victory in your own heart.

Before David ran at Goliath, he reminded himself and King Saul of what God had already done: **“The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”**

(1 Samuel 17:37) David preached his own testimony to himself before the battle. The lion and the bear were his proof. Every past victory became fuel for the next fight.

The enemy loves amnesia. He wants you to forget what God has done so that every new trouble feels like the first one. That is why Scripture keeps telling God’s people to remember. **“I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember Your wonders of old.”** (Psalm 77:11) When you tell your story, you are refusing to forget. You are building a monument with your mouth. And the next time the accuser comes, you can point to the monument and say, “Wrong address, devil. I have seen what my God does.”

Testimony also passes the torch. **“One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.”**

(Psalm 145:4) Your children and grandchildren need more than your rules. They need your stories. They need to hear how God provided when the cupboard was empty, how He healed, how He rescued, how He answered. Those stories become part of their faith foundation.

A Story from the Field

Linda and I have spent our lives on the mission field, two decades in Asia and then another decade in Africa among the Liberian refugee camps. People sometimes imagine that missionaries see miracles every afternoon at four o'clock. We did not. We saw a great deal of ordinary faithfulness, long days, hard heat, and slow, steady work. But every so often the curtain was pulled back, and we saw with our own eyes that the victory of Jesus over darkness is not a doctrine on a page. It is a reality that the powers of darkness themselves are forced to recognize.

I want to tell you about one of those moments, because it has stayed with me for years and has strengthened me in more battles than I can count. It changed the way I preach about Christ's victory, because after that day I was no longer only repeating what I had read. I was reporting what I had seen.

When we first arrived in Africa, we didn't really know what ministry we were going to be involved with. Linda and I had decided to go do missionary work on our own. We were done with denominations, red tape, doctrines, do's and don'ts; we just wanted to follow Jesus and go love on people. When we arrived in Ivory Coast, even though there were fifteen of us, I was the only one who spoke fluent French.

Shortly after we arrived, Linda and I went on a walk after dinner in our neighborhood, and to our surprise, out of a local maquis (a small outdoor restaurant) we heard people speaking English. So we went in and asked who they were. It turned out everyone there was Liberian. They told us that in Abidjan there were thousands of Liberians who had run away from their country to seek refuge in Ivory Coast, since Liberia was still in the middle of a civil war.

Long story short, we found out that they were all trying to survive the best they could in a refugee camp near the worst dump of Abidjan. The next day, we were invited to go and have a

look. Among the many people we met, we talked with university students from Liberia who were trying to organize a school for the children who had run away from the war. The school building was deplorable, nothing but a few rooms in a dilapidated house with no roof. There were a few benches, but most of the kids sat on the dirt floor. In one room, there was a makeshift blackboard. They had no schoolbooks and virtually nothing to teach the kids with. We took pictures of it all, and after spending some time with the teachers to encourage them, we told them we'd be back.

Roughly a week later, we came back and told them that we were ready to start. Linda had written out a full curriculum for the children's schooling, and we had organized our whole team to help teach the children along with the teachers. Because I had to do some work at the Canadian Embassy, I had met with the ambassador himself, who happened to be from my own hometown, and we became friends from the start. I told him what we were trying to do, and he said, "Well, you arrive at the right time, because I'm in the process of reorganizing and refurbishing the embassy, and I can give you computers, printers, desks, whiteboards, and so on."

My eldest son had gone to the main bakery in Abidjan and met with the owners. He told them that we wanted to help those Liberian refugees, and asked if we could perhaps pick up any and all bread that had not been sold at the end of every day.

A week later, when we returned to the refugee camp and met with the teachers again, we told them all that we were planning to do and what we had lined up already. We were quite excited about all that the Lord had done in just one week, and this time, to our surprise, there was no reaction from them. We kept giving testimonies of all the doors the Lord had opened and all the goods we were going to be bringing in, and they just did not react.

So we paused and asked, “Is everything okay? Are we doing anything that may be offending you? Last week, we came to tell you that we wanted to help you. We took pictures of you, the situation, and the needs, and we’re wondering if anything has changed.” One of the teachers stopped us in mid-sentence and said, “Sir Paul, we need to tell you something.”

“There are many people who come to visit us. They are from churches in the U.S., or they are from nonprofit organizations. They usually come with big vans or big jeeps, and they take a lot of pictures. We know that they send them back to their own countries. They put those pictures in their newsletters, but no one ever comes back... And the reason we are not speaking or reacting is that we don’t know what to say... You’re back, and you have all these things lined up to help us.”

It made us cry. We felt very sorry for them. For one, their need was so great that meeting it seemed almost out of reach. Their schoolhouse was not even a house; their school needs were greater than any school’s needs. They didn’t even have food for the kids. They were living off a dump, and it was absolutely deplorable. As time went along, I met with the owner of the wood mill in Abidjan, who told me, “Make a list of everything you need, and I’ll send you a truck.” I also met with the owner of the cement company, who told me, “I’ll send you all the cement that you need.” Then the owner of the paint company reached out to me; he had heard from his cousin, the owner of the wood mill, and told me that he would send all the paint we needed.

Within a few months, we had the school built and the classrooms fully set up. We had desks for every student, blackboards, schoolbooks, and loads of computers, printers, and desks. And every day my son would show up with a taxi full of bread from the main bakery. At the time, we did not have a car, so my son would load up a taxi to the brim, to where he hardly had any space to sit. There were so many of those tall flour bags filled

with bread, and all the children of the village would line up for a piece of bread.

The reason I'm sharing this testimony is not only to highlight the power of testifying, but also to show how important it is to put God on the spot. We can sometimes get so overwhelmed that all we do is look at the circumstances, look at the mountains, and limit God by our small thinking. God is a giver, and if anybody wants to love on people and improve their situations, both spiritually and physically, it's God.

And that became our mode of operation in ministering in the school. If and when there was a need, we taught the teachers and the children not only to look to God but to expect God to come through, and always to glorify God, praise Him, and share testimonies of everything He does on a daily basis, big and small.

There's a small verse hidden in the book of Philemon which says that our faith becomes effectual, meaning that it becomes three-dimensional, as we share the testimonies of all the wonderful things God does. In Philemon 1:6, the apostle Paul writes a prayer for his friend and fellow worker, Philemon, focusing on how living out faith impacts both the believer and the wider community. Your faith becomes more effective, more active, and more three-dimensional as you testify of the great things God does for you. Testifying means enumerating God's faithfulness through every miracle, big and small, in which He manifests Himself.

Sharing testimonies does two wonderful things. It glorifies the Lord. In John 15:8, Jesus says that we are to bear much fruit so as to glorify the Father: **"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."** (John 15:8) Did you notice that it says the proof of your discipleship is to bear much fruit and, by it, glorify the Father? So sharing testimonies of what the Father does not only glorifies Him; it boosts your faith, and it boosts the faith of other people. That's

why sharing testimonies is so important. It's a proof, an actual three-dimensional proof, that God exists, that He is love, and that He loves to love on people.

I tell that story not because Linda and I were anything special, but because Jesus is. If He would do that in that place, among those people, through ordinary servants like us, then He will meet you in your place too. That is the power of a testimony. It is never really about the one telling it. It is about the One it points to.

Christ-Exalting, Not Self-Exalting

There is a wrong way to testify. Some testimonies end up being more about the person than about the Lord. They spend twenty minutes on how bad things were, with a little too much detail, and thirty seconds on Jesus. Or they make the speaker the hero: "I prayed so hard, I fasted so long, I had so much faith." That kind of story may draw attention, but it does not carry the same power, because the power is in the Name, not in the narrator.

The psalmist set the tone: **"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth."** (Psalm 115:1) Paul said the same about his preaching: **"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."** (2 Corinthians 4:5) A good testimony makes Jesus big and makes you a grateful witness.

How to Tell Your Story

Many believers never share their testimony simply because no one ever helped them put it into words. So let me make it practical. Paul told his story several times in the book of Acts, and it always followed a simple pattern: what my life was like before I met Jesus, how I met Him, and what my life has been like since. You can do the same.

Keep it short. You should be able to tell the heart of it in two or three minutes. A friend at the coffee shop does not need your whole autobiography. Keep it honest. Do not exaggerate, and do not make it more dramatic than it was. A quiet conversion is just as much a miracle as a dramatic one; every new birth is a resurrection. Keep it clear. Say Jesus' name. Do not leave people wondering who helped you. Keep it current. Your testimony is not only what happened twenty years ago. What has God done this year? This week? Fresh testimonies carry fresh fire.

A man I will call Samuel used to say he had no testimony because he was raised in a Christian home and never had a wild season. Then someone asked him, "Has God ever kept you from something? Has He ever answered a prayer? Has He ever carried you through a loss?" Samuel thought for a moment and realized he had dozens of stories. He just had never thought of them as weapons. Within a month he had shared one of them with a neighbor who was going through the same kind of loss, and it opened a door that years of polite small talk never had.

Write down three things God has done for you. Practice saying them out loud. Then ask the Holy Spirit to give you an opening this week. He will. You overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony. The blood has done its part. Now it is your turn to open your mouth and say so.

CHAPTER 19

Deliverance: Setting the Captives Free

When Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of His ministry, He was handed the scroll of Isaiah. He unrolled it and found the place, and He read His own job description out loud: **“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”** (Luke 4:18)

Liberty to the captives. Liberty to the oppressed. That was not a side project for Jesus. It was the heart of His mission. Peter later summed up Jesus’ whole ministry this way: **“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”** (Acts 10:38)

When we talk about the spoils of war, deliverance is right at the center of it. The spoils of Christ’s victory are not gold and jewelry. They are people. Men, women, and children who were held captive by the enemy and are now set free. Every time someone is delivered, the strong man’s house is being plundered all over again.

This Is Normal Christianity

Many believers feel uneasy when deliverance comes up. Some picture scary movies. Others picture strange meetings with a lot of shouting and very little Scripture. So they decide the whole subject is best left alone. But Jesus did not leave it alone, and He did not leave it to a special class of experts.

When He sent out the twelve, He said, **“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”** (Matthew 10:8) And before He ascended, He said this would mark ordinary believers everywhere: **“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues.”**

(Mark 16:17) Notice who the signs follow. Not apostles only. Not pastors only. Those who believe. If you believe, this belongs to you.

When the seventy came back from their first mission, they were bubbling over with excitement: **“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”** (Luke 10:17) Jesus did not tell them to calm down. He told them where to keep their joy: **“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** (Luke 10:20) That is a healthy balance. Deliverance is real, and it is part of our authority. But the center of our joy is not power over demons. It is belonging to God.

Not Every Problem Is a Demon

Before we go further, we must be wise. One of the quickest ways to bring confusion and hurt into the body of Christ is to treat every problem as a demon. Some people see a devil behind every bad mood, every headache, and every flat tire. That is not discernment. It is superstition, and it does real damage.

The Bible shows us at least three other sources of trouble that are not demonic at all.

Sometimes it is the flesh. The flesh is our old, self-centered nature, and it has habits. Paul listed its works in Galatians 5, things like anger, jealousy, and selfish ambition. You cannot cast out the flesh. You crucify it. **“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”**

(Galatians 5:24) If a man has a temper, he may not need a

deliverance session. He may need to repent, receive grace, and learn to walk in the Spirit. Blaming a demon for what the flesh is doing just lets the flesh off the hook.

Sometimes it is sickness that needs a doctor. The body is a physical thing, and it breaks down. Thyroid problems, chemical imbalances, infections, injuries, and many other conditions can produce symptoms that look frightening. Jesus healed the sick and He cast out demons, and the Gospels are careful to distinguish between the two. Matthew says, **“And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.”**

(Matthew 8:16) Two different needs, two different ministries. Never, ever tell someone to stop taking their medication or to avoid treatment because you think their problem is spiritual. Pray for them, yes. Stand with them in faith, absolutely. But seeking God and seeing a doctor are not rivals.

Sometimes it is wounds that need healing. A woman who was abused as a child may struggle with fear and distrust for years. That is not necessarily a demon. It is a wound. Jesus came **“to heal the brokenhearted”** (Luke 4:18), and that healing often comes through love, truth, patient counsel, forgiveness, and time in His presence. **“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”** (Psalm 147:3) A wound needs a bandage, not a rebuke.

I knew a young mother I will call Joy who became convinced she was under demonic attack. She could not sleep, she was anxious all the time, and she felt dark thoughts crowding in. Some well-meaning friends prayed loud prayers over her that left her more frightened than before. Finally a wise older woman sat with her, prayed quietly, and then said, “Joy, have you seen your doctor since the baby was born?” She had not. It turned out her body was struggling after the birth, and with proper medical care, rest, and the steady support of her church family, the darkness lifted.

Joy needed love and medical help, not an exorcism. That is discernment.

At the same time, we must not swing to the other ditch and pretend demons do not exist. Jesus met a woman who “had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years,” and He said plainly that she was one **“whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years”** (Luke 13:11, 16). Sometimes a problem does have a demonic root. There may be torment that does not respond to anything else, compulsions with a strange driven quality, a violent reaction to the name of Jesus, or a history of deep occult involvement. Ask the Holy Spirit for discernment. He will show you what you are dealing with.

Open Doors

How does a believer or an unbeliever come under demonic influence in the first place? The Bible speaks of giving the devil a place. **“Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”**

(Ephesians 4:26-27) The word “place” means a foothold, a piece of ground. Unresolved anger is one way of handing it over.

Other common open doors include unforgiveness held onto for years, deliberate involvement in the occult (fortune tellers, spiritism, witchcraft, curses), persistent and willful sin that a person refuses to give up, and sometimes deep trauma that the enemy uses as an entry point. Paul described people who had been “taken captive by him to do his will,” and he said the way out was to **“come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil”** (2 Timothy 2:26). A snare is a trap. Most people do not walk into a trap on purpose. They wander into it.

The good news is that a door that was opened can be closed. That is where deliverance begins.

How Jesus Did It, and How You Can Help Someone

Jesus never put on a show. He did not spend hours wrestling with spirits or interviewing them for information. Matthew tells us He cast out spirits **“with a word.”** (Matthew 8:16) In the synagogue at Capernaum, when a spirit cried out, Jesus simply said, **“Be quiet, and come out of him!”** (Mark 1:25) Short. Direct. Full of authority. That is our model.

If you are ever called upon to minister freedom to someone, here is a simple, biblical pattern. It is not a formula, because the Holy Spirit is the one leading. But it will keep you on solid ground.

First, stay calm and stay loving. You are not there to fight the person. You are there to free them. Speak to them kindly, look them in the eye, and assure them that Jesus loves them and has already won.

Second, make sure they belong to Jesus, or lead them to Him. The house has to come under a new owner. Deliverance without salvation is like evicting a squatter and leaving the door unlocked.

Third, help them close the doors. Ask gently whether there is anyone they need to forgive, any occult involvement they need to renounce, any sin they need to confess. Let them say it out loud in their own words. **“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”**

(James 5:16) As they renounce and forgive, the enemy loses his legal ground.

Fourth, take authority in Jesus’ name. Speak directly and briefly. “In the name of Jesus, I command every spirit of fear to leave now.” You do not have to shout. Volume is not authority. Authority comes from the Name and from your position in Christ. Then, fifth, pray for the Holy Spirit to fill every place that has been emptied, and bless them with peace.

Finally, follow up. Freedom is a beginning, not an ending.

Keep the House Filled

Jesus gave a sobering warning about what happens after deliverance: **“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”**

(Matthew 12:43-45)

Look at the key word: empty. The house was clean, but nobody was living in it. Freedom must be filled. The person who has been delivered needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit, planted in the Word, joined to a loving fellowship, and taught to walk in the new life. A swept house that stays empty is an invitation. A house filled with the presence of God is a fortress. Jesus promised, **“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”** (John 8:36) Free indeed means free and staying free.

A Night I Will Not Forget

Over our years on the mission field, Linda and I saw things that many believers in comfortable places only read about. In parts of the world where spirits are openly worshiped and feared, the powers of darkness do not bother hiding. And in those places, we learned firsthand that the name of Jesus is not a religious formula. It is the highest authority in the universe, and every spirit knows it.

One encounter in particular stands out to me whenever I think about deliverance. I did not go looking for it. It came looking for us, in the middle of an ordinary stretch of ministry, and I can still remember how my heart felt when I realized what we were facing.

We were living in Mexico at that time, and a friend of ours told us about a family that was constantly attacked by demons. Apparently there were evil spirits in their house, and they were constantly attacked with fear and torment. They would hear noises. They would see things break on their own: things falling off the shelf, frames coming off the wall, and so on. Linda and I were asked to go and pray with the parents.

Sure enough, when we got there, the parents were in total fear, especially since that very morning the bathroom sink had broken. Being made of glass, it was all over the bathroom floor in a thousand pieces. The father kept telling us, “See, that’s the devil, constantly breaking things in our house. There are evil spirits here.”

After hearing a number of testimonies of the devil’s works, we explained to them how the Lord had given believers the power to cast out demons. I told them that it wasn’t given to special people, great and mighty men of God, or priests or pastors, but to all believers. I explained to them that we, as believers, have been ordained. In John 15:16, Jesus tells us, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”** (John 15:16) In other words, we have been deputized to do the same miracles Jesus did. He has given us the power.

I wanted them to understand that it is not for us simply to walk into the house, cast out the evil spirits, and then walk away. If and when we do that, people will think it must be because we’re special people, that we are particularly anointed, that we have a gift, or that we have been specially trained. All believers are given the same power. Paul specifically says, **“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”** (2 Timothy 1:7)

Those poor people, through fear, were empowering the works of the devil in their home. But as soon as we took authority over the

demons through the power and the name of Jesus, that house was cleansed. And more importantly, those people knew then that it wasn't us; it was Christ. It wasn't our power, our training, or our ability; it was the authority given to all believers by Christ. It is the name of Jesus that has the power.

In some ways, that lesson was not only for the people in that house, but also for the sister who had come to us asking us to go and pray for them. Unbeknownst to her, she herself had the same power. And that's why it's important not just to exercise your own authority by commanding the works of the devil, but also to teach the people around you. That power is not given only to a few rare people, but to all believers. Sadly, it is not taught enough, and it is definitely not exercised enough, in most of our modern churches.

What I learned that day is what I want you to carry away from this chapter. It was not our strength, our volume, or our experience that set those people free. It was Jesus, working through simple servants who knew whose Name was speaking. And while we freed the house of demons, we also freed the people living in that house from the fear of demons. It was their own spiritual ignorance, through fear, that in some ways was calling, or at least tolerating, that presence in their home.

Never Fear

The last word on deliverance must be this: do not be afraid. The enemy loves to make believers nervous about this subject, because a nervous believer will never use the authority he has. But hear the Word: **“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** (1 John 4:4)

A demon is not your equal. It is a defeated rebel facing a son of the King. It must bow to the name of Jesus. You do not need to be fascinated with darkness, and you do not need to be frightened

of it. You simply need to know who you are, whose you are, and what Christ has already won. He bound the strong man. He plundered his house. He calls you to walk in and carry out the captives.

Freely you have received. Freely give. There are people all around you, in your family, at your work, in your neighborhood, who are bound and do not know the way out. You know the One who is the way. Go set the captives free.

PART FOUR — THE SOLDIER UNDER ORDERS

CHAPTER 20

The Negotiation Table Is Closed

We have spent a good many pages looking at what Christ won at the cross and at the weapons He has placed in our hands. We have talked about the armor, the name, the blood, prayer, praise, fasting, preaching, testimony and deliverance. Those are mighty things. But there is a question sitting quietly underneath every one of them, and if we do not answer it, all the rest becomes dangerous. The question is simple: who is giving the orders?

A crowd with swords is a riot. An army is a crowd under command. The soldier who picks up a weapon but refuses orders is a liability to everyone standing near him. So before we talk about going on the offense and taking the spoils, we need to settle the matter of who is in charge.

We live in an age that has learned to negotiate almost everything, from the price of a car to the bedtime of a toddler. Many believers have quietly carried that game into their relationship with God. "Lord, You can have my Sunday morning, but my Saturday night is mine." "I will serve You, just do not send me anywhere uncomfortable." We push a counter-offer across the table and wait to see if heaven will meet us halfway.

Let me say it as plainly as I know how: the King of the universe does not sit at a negotiation table with rebels. He does not haggle. He does not split the difference. He does not go and talk to His manager, because He has none. He calls us to surrender, to repent, to follow, and to stop treating His commandments as

suggestions and His Lordship as a future upgrade we might buy one day when we feel more spiritual.

Terms of Peace

Jesus once told a little story about two kings that makes the point beautifully. **"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace."** (Luke 14:31-32)

Look carefully at what the weaker king does. He does not send a delegation to dictate terms. He does not say, "Here is what I am willing to give up, and here is what I am keeping." He has counted the armies, he knows he cannot win, and so he sends messengers to ask what the stronger king requires. That is the posture of a person coming to Christ. We do not come with conditions. We come asking for His.

And here is the wonderful surprise of the Gospel. When we ask for the King's conditions of peace, we discover that He has already paid for the peace Himself. The terms are not harsh. They are total. He gives everything, and He asks for everything.

One Jesus, Not Two

There is a version of Christianity being offered today that sounds comforting and easy to manage. It says you can receive Jesus as Savior now and decide later whether to receive Him as Lord. It offers Jesus like a phone plan: a basic Savior package for forgiveness and heaven, and a premium Lordship package for the keen, with an upgrade available any time.

The problem is that Scripture never once presents Jesus as divided. When the angel announced His birth to the shepherds, he did not announce two people. **"For there is born to you this**

day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

(Luke 2:11) One baby. One Person. Savior, Christ, and Lord, all at once, wrapped in the same swaddling cloths. When Peter preached the first Gospel sermon at Pentecost, he finished with these words: **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** (Acts 2:36) Both. Not one now and the other later.

Even the confession that brings salvation has Lordship built right into it. **"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."** (Romans 10:9) You cannot confess "the Lord Jesus" while privately meaning "the Helper Jesus" or "the Emergency Jesus." Jesus is not a spiritual emergency contact you call when the house is on fire and ignore for the rest of the year.

Imagine a bride at the altar who says, "I will take his name and his bank account, but I will be keeping my old boyfriend."

Everyone would know something has gone badly wrong. Yet that is what a Savior-only gospel proposes. It wants the benefits of the covenant without the Person of the covenant. It wants grace without government. But the prophet told us long ago where the government sits: **"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder."** (Isaiah 9:6)

Why Call Me Lord?

Jesus Himself asked a question that still stands over every believer: **"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"** (Luke 6:46) It is a gentle question, but it is a sharp one. The word "Lord" is not a polite religious title, like "Reverend" or "Sir." It means the one who has the final say. It means owner, master, the one whose word settles the matter.

So "No, Lord" is one of the strangest sentences a human being can say. If He is Lord, the answer is yes. We can sing about His Lordship on Sunday and deny it with our choices on Monday. Jesus warned that this gap is not small. **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."** (Matthew 7:21)

King Saul is the classic negotiator in the Bible. God gave him a clear command in battle against the Amalekites. Saul obeyed most of it. He just kept back the best of the sheep and the cattle, and he spared the enemy king. Then, when the prophet Samuel came to him, Saul greeted him with a big smile and said, **"Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD."** (1 Samuel 15:13) I love Samuel's reply, because it has a little holy humor in it. **"What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"** (1 Samuel 15:14) Saul had negotiated his own version of obedience, and the evidence was standing right behind him, mooing.

Saul claimed the animals were for a sacrifice. That is how negotiated obedience always talks; it dresses up the part it kept as something religious. Samuel answered, **"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."** (1 Samuel 15:22-23) That is how seriously heaven takes a counter-offer.

A Soldier Does Not Entangle Himself

Paul wrote to young Timothy as one soldier to another. **"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."** (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

Look at that last phrase: "him who enlisted him." You did not enlist yourself. You did not walk into the recruiting office and

sign up on your own initiative. He called you, He chose you, He paid for you, and He enlisted you. The soldier's whole aim, Paul says, is to please the one who enlisted him. Not to please himself, not to please the crowd, not even to please his fellow soldiers, but to please his Commander.

Now, this does not mean a believer must quit his job, leave his family and go and live in a tent. The issue is not involvement in ordinary life; it is entanglement. Picture a soldier trying to cross a river while carrying a sofa, a set of golf clubs and a box of old magazines he cannot bear to part with. He is not going to drown because those things are evil. He is going to drown because he is tangled up in them. An entangled soldier cannot move when the order comes.

The Lordship of Jesus keeps us free to move. The happiest people in the universe are those who move when God says move, speak when God says speak, and stay when God says stay, not because they are forced, but because they love Him.

The Centurion Who Understood Authority

There is one man in the Gospels who astonished Jesus with his faith, and it was not a priest or a scholar. It was a Roman army officer. His servant was sick at home, and Jesus offered to come. The centurion stopped Him. **"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."** (Matthew 8:8-9) And the Bible says, **"When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'"** (Matthew 8:10)

Notice how the centurion explained his own authority. He did not say, "I am a man with authority." He said, "I am a man under

authority." He understood something that many believers miss. The only reason his soldiers obeyed him was that he himself obeyed Rome. The moment he went rogue and stopped answering to his superiors, his orders would carry no more weight than a stranger shouting in the street. His authority flowed downward to him precisely because he stood in line underneath it.

That is the secret of spiritual authority. Surrender is the doorway to authority. We have authority over the enemy only because we are under the authority of Christ. James puts the order exactly right: **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7) Submit first, resist second. Many believers shout at the devil while they are in quiet rebellion against God, and then wonder why he is not impressed. A police officer who has handed in his badge can still wear the uniform, but if he tries to stop traffic, nobody needs to obey him. The badge works only for those who still serve under the commissioner.

Turning Yourself In

In 1974, on a small island in the Philippines, a Japanese army officer finally walked out of the jungle and laid down his rifle. The Second World War had ended twenty-nine years earlier. For nearly three decades he had kept fighting a war that was already over, because nobody he trusted had given him the order to stand down. In the end his former commanding officer had to travel to the island in person and read him his orders. Only then did he surrender.

Many people are living just like that. Christ has won; the cross and the empty tomb have settled it forever. Yet they are still crouched in the jungle of self-rule, defending a throne that was never theirs. And the King, in His great kindness, has come in person to say, "It is over. You can come out now."

One day, the Bible says, **"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**

(Philippians 2:10-11) Every knee will bow. The only question is whether we bow now, gladly, as sons and daughters, or later, as defeated rebels. I know which I would choose.

Surrender is not the end of your life. It is the beginning of it. Jesus put it this way: **"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**

(Matthew 11:29-30) There is freedom in obedience. There is safety in surrender. There is a deep, settled beauty in belonging fully to Christ.

So close the negotiation table. Throw away your list of counter-offers. Get down on your knees, not as a beaten enemy but as a loved child, and tell Him what He has been waiting to hear: "Lord, You have the final say. Not some of it. All of it." The King is not asking for a corner of your life. He is calling for all of it. And when He has all of it, you will discover that He was only ever asking for the very thing He wanted to fill with Himself.

CHAPTER 21

A Lordship Inventory

Every good shopkeeper knows the importance of stocktaking. Once or twice a year he closes the doors, gets out his clipboard, and walks every aisle counting what is actually on the shelves. It is necessary, because what he thinks he has and what he really has are rarely the same. Somewhere something has been sitting at the back of the storeroom for years, quietly going bad.

In the last chapter we closed the negotiation table. We said that Jesus is Lord of all or He is not being treated as Lord at all. That is easy to agree with until we walk our own aisles with a clipboard. So this chapter is a stocktaking. It is a Lordship inventory. It is not written to make you feel condemned; it is written to set you free. The goal is not religious pressure. The goal is restored order.

Before We Begin the Count

Remember that sentence Jesus spoke right after His story about the two kings? Here it is. **"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."** (Luke 14:33) Notice the word "all." Not most. Not the obvious things. All. This does not mean that every disciple must sell his house and give away his car. It means that every disciple must hand over the title deeds. You may still live in the house, but you no longer own it. He does. You become the steward, and He becomes the owner.

Paul said the same thing in the language of worship. **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** (Romans 12:1) Someone

once said that the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. That is why we need an inventory. Surrender is not only a one-time event; it is a daily practice of checking whether we have quietly climbed back down.

So before we begin, pray the prayer David prayed. **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."** (Psalm 139:23-24) Do not do this inventory with your own flashlight. You will shine it only on the tidy shelves. Ask the Holy Spirit to hold the light. He is kind, He is thorough, and He never exposes anything He does not intend to heal.

The Wallet and the Clock

Let us start where Jesus so often started: with money. He talked about money again and again, not because He wanted our money, but because He knew how quickly money wants our hearts. **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:21) And again, **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."** (Matthew 6:24)

Here are a few honest questions for this aisle. If someone read your bank statement for the last three months, what would they conclude you worship? When God prompts you to give, do you obey, or do you first check whether it fits the budget? None of these questions are meant to shame you. They are meant to show you whether money is a tool in your hand or a master on your back. **"Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"** (Luke 16:11)

The next aisle is time. Many of us would hand Jesus our wallet more easily than our calendar. I once knew a businessman, let us

call him Richard, who gave generously to every missionary who came through his church. But when the Lord began to nudge him to spend one evening a week mentoring a young man from a broken home, Richard found he was simply too busy. He would gladly write a check for ten times the value of that evening. He just could not give the evening. It took him a while to realize that the Lord did not want his money in place of his time. He wanted both.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

(Ephesians 5:15-16) Ask yourself: does my schedule reflect His priorities or mine? Where does the first hour of my day go? Is there room in my week for the things He has asked me to do, or have I filled every slot and then told Him there is no space? "So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom."

(Psalm 90:12)

Ambition and Relationships

Ambition is not a sin. God made us to build, to grow and to bear fruit. But ambition becomes a rival king when our plans are made first and God is invited only to bless them afterward. James has a word for the kind of planner who leaves God out. **"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"** (James 4:13-15)

Are your career moves made in prayer, or only reported to God after the fact? Would you take a promotion that cost your family its spiritual health? If the Lord asked you to step down, move

across the world, or stay put when everyone else is climbing, would you obey? **"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** (Matthew 6:33) Notice the word "first." Not second, after the business plan is finished.

Then come relationships, and this aisle often has the most boxes hidden at the back. Who has the greater say in your decisions, Jesus or a particular friend, partner or family member? Are you in a romantic relationship that you know the Lord has not blessed, and are you hoping He will simply look the other way? Is your sexuality under His Lordship, or have you kept that one room locked? **"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

And what about the company you keep? **"Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'"** (1 Corinthians 15:33) Jesus ate with sinners, but He was the one doing the influencing. Which way is the influence flowing in your closest friendships? And what about the person you have refused to forgive? Unforgiveness is a relationship where you have kept the keys and told the King He may not enter.

The Mouth, the Screen, and the Closed Door

We have already given a whole chapter to the power of words, so here we will only shine the light briefly. Is your speech under His Lordship? Do you gossip, complain, exaggerate or tear people down? Would your words at the dinner table this week sound different if Jesus were sitting in the empty chair? He is, you know.

Now we come to what you watch alone. This is one of the most searching aisles of all, because nobody else is in it. **"I will set**

nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me." (Psalm 101:3) What do you watch when no one else is in the room? What do you scroll through late at night? What does your search history say about who is really Lord of your eyes? Job made a remarkable decision: **"I have made a covenant with my eyes."** (Job 31:1) Have you?

Social media deserves its own shelf. It is a wonderful tool and a terrible master. Does it shape your mood more than the Word does? Do you compare yourself with everyone else's highlight reel and come away discontented? Does the phone come out before the Bible in the morning? I am not asking you to throw your phone into the sea. I am asking who holds it.

And finally, there are the private decisions, the closed doors. The things nobody else will ever know about. The little choices made in the car, at the desk, in the kitchen at midnight. These small places are not small to God. They are the training fields of spiritual authority. **"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."** (Colossians 3:17) "Whatever" leaves nothing out.

Where Have You Fired the King?

Most believers would never announce, "I have decided that Jesus is no longer Lord of my finances." That is not how it usually happens. It is much quieter than that. We simply stop asking Him. It is a bit like a company whose board never formally fires the chairman, but stops inviting him to meetings, stops sending him the reports, and starts making decisions without him. On paper he is still in charge. In practice, he has been fired.

So here is the question at the heart of this inventory: where have you fired the King? Where have you stopped asking Him what He wants? Where have you said, in effect, "Thank You, Lord, but

I will handle this one myself"? It may be your money, your marriage, your ambitions, your eyes or your evenings. Wherever it is, it is a place where the enemy can find ground, because ground that is not under Christ's government is ground left open.

Let me tell you about a woman I will call Helen. She was a faithful believer, active in her church and generous with her time. But for years she had quietly carried bitterness toward her sister over the way their mother's estate had been divided. She would say, "That is family business; it has nothing to do with my walk with God." When Helen finally did her own Lordship inventory, she discovered that this one locked room had been leaking into every other room of her house. Her prayers felt flat. Her joy was thin. She was more irritable with her husband than she cared to admit. The day she handed that key to Jesus, called her sister and asked forgiveness for her own part, it was as if someone had opened all the windows in the house at once.

Handing Over the Keys

Imagine you hire a house-sitter while you are away, and you give her a ring of keys. "This is the front door, this is the back door, this is the garage." Then you slip one key off the ring and put it in your pocket. "And that one is the basement. You will not be needing that." Every house-sitter in the world would wonder what is down in that basement.

Many of us have done the same thing with Jesus. We gave Him the ring of keys on the day we were saved, but we kept one or two in our pocket. Lordship means handing over the last key. It means saying, "Lord, there is no room in this house You may not enter, no drawer You may not open, no decision You may not overrule." Paul summed up this surrender in one great sentence: **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the**

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

If you want help building the daily habits that keep these keys in the right hands, my book *The Discipline of a Disciple*, available at faithwithoutborders.us, walks through them in practical detail. But do not wait for another book. Do it now. Go back through the aisles: the wallet, the clock, the ambitions, the relationships, the mouth, the screen, the closed doors. Wherever you have fired the King, repent. Wherever you have kept the keys, surrender them. Wherever you have called Him Lord but refused His command, come back under His authority.

And do not be afraid of what He will do with the keys. He is not a burglar; He is the rightful owner, and He loves the house more than you do. **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."**

(John 14:15) Obedience is simply love with its sleeves rolled up. The inventory is finished not when every shelf is perfect, but when every shelf belongs to Him.

CHAPTER 22

Grace Does Not Excuse, It Empowers

Whenever we talk about Lordship, obedience and surrender, someone in the back row starts to look nervous. "But wait a minute," they say, "aren't we saved by grace? Isn't all this talk of obedience just a sneaky way back into law and works?" It is a fair question, and it deserves a clear answer. The answer is that grace is the very thing that makes obedience possible. But to see that, we first have to deal with a counterfeit.

Grace has been twisted in many places into a license to do whatever we want, an excuse for spiritual laziness, and a justification for living defeated. Many believers who should be walking in freedom tolerate compromise because they think grace just covers it all up. Let us call it what it is. That is a dangerous lie. True grace does not excuse you. It empowers you. It does not lower God's standards. It raises you into the ability to walk in them. It does not give you permission to remain unchanged. It gives you supernatural power to change.

The Counterfeit Called Cheap Grace

Cheap grace is grace that costs nothing and changes nothing. It is forgiveness without repentance, comfort without correction, a Savior without a Lord. It is preached in some contemporary churches as if the only thing God ever wanted from us was a one-time prayer, after which we may go on living however we like with a heavenly insurance policy tucked in our back pocket.

This is not a new problem. Jude warned about it in the first century: "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God

and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude 4) Notice that the people who twist grace into an excuse for sin are, in the same breath, denying the Lordship of Jesus. Cheap grace and a Savior-only gospel always travel together. They are two sides of the same counterfeit coin.

Cheap grace says, "God understands, so stay as you are." True grace says, "God has made you new, so rise and walk in the power He has given you." Cheap grace makes excuses. True grace trains obedience. Cheap grace produces spiritual infants who never grow up. True grace produces warriors.

I think of a young man I will call Kevin. He came to Christ with a real hunger, but he had a habit he could not seem to break. Somewhere along the way he heard a message that told him, in effect, "Don't worry about it. It's all under the blood. God sees you as perfect, so there is no need to fight it." Kevin found that message very comforting for about two years. Then he found it was killing him. The habit grew. His prayer life shriveled. His boldness drained away. He felt forgiven in theory and trapped in practice. It was not until someone sat with him and opened the Scriptures on what grace actually does that Kevin realized he had been given a blanket when what he needed was a sword.

Here is the difference. Grace is not a rug that covers sin so we can keep walking in filth. Grace is an engine that carries us out of it.

Saved From and Saved To

The most famous verses on grace in the whole Bible are these: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9) This is foundational. We do not earn salvation. We do not buy our way into God's kingdom with good behavior. Salvation is a gift, start to finish.

But we must not stop reading at verse nine. The very next verse says this: **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** (Ephesians 2:10) Grace saves us from something, and it saves us to something. It saves us from sin and death, and it saves us to righteousness and life. If we preach the "from" and ignore the "to," we end up with a lopsided gospel that forgives people without forming disciples.

Think of a lifeguard who pulls a drowning man out of the sea. The man is saved from drowning. Wonderful. But imagine if he then walked straight back into the waves, because, after all, he has a lifeguard now. You would rightly say he had misunderstood the whole point of being rescued. He was not saved from the water so that he could go back in. He was saved so that he could live on dry ground. Paul said Jesus **"gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."** (Titus 2:14) Zealous for good works. That is what grace is aiming at.

Grace Is a Teacher

If you want to see how grace actually works, look at Titus 2:11-12. It is one of the most important passages for any warrior to understand. **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age."** (Titus 2:11-12)

Take notice of that little word "teaching." Grace teaches. Grace trains. Grace instructs. The word Paul used is the word for raising and training a child. Grace is not only a pardon handed down from a judge's bench; it is a personal trainer who moves in with you. It teaches you to say no to ungodliness and yes to a

sober, righteous, godly life, right here, right now, in the present age.

That means grace is not permission to sin. Grace is the power to stop sinning. It is divine enablement that lets the believer look temptation in the eye and say no to what is wrong and yes to what is right. If someone uses grace as an excuse to continue in compromise, he is not operating in biblical grace at all. He is operating in deception, however biblical the words may sound.

Jesus showed us this with the woman caught in adultery. Everyone remembers His words, "Neither do I condemn you." Fewer people remember how He finished the sentence: **"go and sin no more."** (John 8:11) Both halves are grace. The first half lifts her out from under condemnation. The second half sends her into a new life. Cheap grace keeps only the first half. True grace keeps both, because it came from the One who is **"full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14)

God Forbid

Paul knew that people would try to twist grace into a get-out-of-jail-free card, so he raised the question himself. **"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"** (Romans 6:1-2)

His answer was not gentle confusion. It was absolute rejection. "Certainly not!" Older translations put it, "God forbid!" Paul is saying that the very idea is unthinkable. Why? Because grace did not merely forgive your sin; it united you with Christ in His death and resurrection, so that the old reign of sin could be broken. You did not just get a pardon. You got a funeral and a resurrection. The person who loved sin was buried with Christ, and a new person was raised to walk in newness of life.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old

things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

And then comes one of the most liberating promises in the whole Bible. **"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** (Romans 6:14) Read that slowly. Paul does not say, "Sin shall not be counted against you, because you are under grace," although that is true too. He says sin shall not have dominion over you. Grace does not leave sin on the throne and simply stop keeping score. Grace knocks sin off the throne. Being under grace is the very reason sin has lost its right to rule you.

Where Sin Abounded

"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:20-21)

This verse is sometimes quoted as if it meant, "Sin as much as you like; grace will always be bigger." But look at what it actually says. Grace abounds so that grace might reign. Reign over what? Over the very territory where sin used to reign. Grace is not bigger than sin so that we can keep sinning; grace is bigger than sin so that we can finally stop. It is like a flood of clean water poured into a polluted river. The point of the flood is not to give the pollution more room to swim. The point is to wash it out.

This is one of the great spoils of war that Christ won at the cross. The enemy had built a kingdom on the back of human sin. Grace is God's invasion of that kingdom, not merely to pardon the prisoners but to overthrow the jailer. When you treat grace as a blanket for sin, you are, without realizing it, handing that

territory back to the enemy. When you receive grace as power over sin, you are taking the spoils.

Passive Believer or Grace-Trained Warrior

So we come to a choice. A believer who misunderstands grace becomes passive. He assumes that because God has done everything, he need do nothing. He waits for victory to fall on him like rain. He confuses resting in Christ with lying down in front of the enemy. And the enemy is delighted, because a passive believer is a disarmed believer.

A believer who understands grace becomes dangerous. He knows he is not fighting in his own strength. He knows every ounce of power comes from God. But precisely because he knows that, he gets up and fights. **"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."** (2 Timothy 2:1) Strong in grace. Not lazy in grace, not hiding behind grace, but strong in it.

Peter tells us that God's **"divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."** (2 Peter 1:3) All things. Grace has not left you short of anything you need to live a godly life. When temptation comes, grace has already provided the way out. **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."** (1 Corinthians 10:13) The grace-trained warrior looks for that door and walks through it.

So the next time temptation knocks, do not let cheap grace answer the door. Cheap grace says, "It's fine, give in, God understands." True grace says, "You are under grace, therefore you have power to resist this now." Speak it aloud if you need to: "Grace empowers me to say no to this and yes to God." That is not legalism. That is grace doing exactly what grace was sent to do. In the next chapter we will see how grace and obedience

walk together, hand in hand, like two partners who were never meant to be separated.

CHAPTER 23

Grace and Obedience Are Partners: "Why Call Me Lord?"

Many sincere Christians are afraid that if we speak too much about obedience, discipline, holiness and responsibility, we will slide back into legalism. So they avoid those words. They speak only of grace, rest and acceptance, and they hope obedience will somehow happen by itself. Others swing the other way. They speak only of duty and effort, and grace becomes a word they mention once at the start and then forget.

Both are built on a false choice. Grace and obedience are not enemies. They are partners. Grace empowers obedience, and obedience lets grace flow freely through daily life. Think of a rowboat with two oars. If you row only with the oar of grace and never pull with the oar of obedience, you go round and round in circles. If you row only with the oar of effort and leave grace in the bottom of the boat, you go round in circles the other way, and you get very tired doing it. It takes both oars in the water to cross the lake.

The House on the Rock

Jesus ended His great sermon with a question and a story. The question we have already met: **"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"** (Luke 6:46) Then He told the story. **"Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it,**

for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

(Luke 6:47-49)

Notice what the two builders have in common. Both came to Jesus. Both heard His sayings. Both built a house. From the street, on a sunny day, the two houses might have looked exactly alike. The difference was underground, in a place nobody could see. One man dug deep. The other did not bother. And the difference between digging and not digging, Jesus said, is the difference between hearing and doing.

Digging is hard work. It is not glamorous. It is the part of building nobody photographs. But when the flood comes, and in spiritual warfare the flood always comes, it is the only part that matters. A believer who hears a hundred sermons and obeys none of them has built a beautiful house on sand. A believer who obeys what he hears, even in small things, is pouring concrete into the rock. The storm will tell the difference.

Grace That Was Not in Vain

When the Lord spoke to Paul about his weakness, He gave him one of the most comforting promises in the Bible. **"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."** (2 Corinthians 12:9) Grace is sufficient, not because it makes excuses for weakness, but because it brings God's strength into weakness. Grace is not the absence of effort. It is the presence of divine ability.

And what did that grace produce in Paul? He tells us. **"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all,**

yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

(1 Corinthians 15:10) Read that again. Grace did not make Paul passive. It made him the hardest-working apostle of them all. He labored more abundantly than anyone. And yet, in the same breath, he says, "not I, but the grace of God." Both are true at once. Paul worked, and grace worked. Paul labored, and grace was the power in the labor.

That little phrase "not in vain" is worth pausing on. It is possible to receive grace in vain. It is possible for God to pour His power into a life and for that life to do nothing with it, like a man who is given a powerful car and leaves it parked in the garage with the battery running flat. Paul refused to let that happen. He cooperated with grace, and grace carried him across the world.

Work Out What God Works In

Paul gives us the partnership in a single sentence in Philippians. **"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."** (Philippians 2:12-13)

Notice the order. God works in; we work out. He does not say "work for your salvation." You cannot work for something you have already been given. He says "work out" what God has worked in. It is like a gardener with a packet of seeds. He did not make the seeds. He cannot make them grow. All the life is in the seed, and all the growth comes from God. But the gardener still has to dig, plant, water and pull the weeds. If he sits on the porch and says, "Growth is God's work, not mine," he will have a very poor harvest.

And look at what God works in us: "both to will and to do." He gives us the desire, and He gives us the ability. Even the wanting is grace. When you feel a fresh desire to pray, to obey, to forgive,

to break with a sin, that desire did not come from nowhere. That is God working in you to will. Your part is to say yes and act on it, and when you do, you will find He is also working in you to do.

So let us be very clear. Obedience does not earn grace. Obedience cooperates with grace. Discipline does not purchase salvation. Discipline trains the vessel that salvation has already made new. The warrior does not obey in order to be accepted by God. He obeys because he already is accepted in Christ, and grace now empowers him to live like it.

Doers, Not Hearers Only

James puts it in plain words that a child could understand. **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** (James 1:22) Notice who gets deceived. Not the preacher. Not the neighbors. The hearer who does not do deceives himself. He mistakes listening for living. He thinks that because he agrees with the sermon, he has obeyed it.

James goes on to compare such a person to a man who looks at his face in a mirror, sees that his hair is a mess and there is breakfast on his chin, and then walks away and forgets what he saw. The mirror did its job. The man did not. But then James adds a promise: **"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."** (James 1:25) The blessing is not in the hearing. The blessing is in the doing.

This is why the enemy does not mind Christians filling notebooks with good teaching, as long as nothing changes. He is not afraid of a Bible on the nightstand or a sermon in the head. He is afraid of a disciple who hears and then gets up and does. The question is never whether we agree with the Word. The question is whether we will become what it says.

When You Fall

Now we must be honest. Every disciple will face moments of weakness and failure. Every warrior gets knocked down sometimes. What does grace say then? Cheap grace shrugs and says, "Don't worry about it; nothing really matters."

Condemnation stands over you and says, "You call yourself a Christian? You have ruined everything. Don't even bother praying." True grace says neither. True grace says, "You are forgiven. Now stand up, confess it, turn from it, and walk in the cleansing power of God."

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

(1 John 1:9) Notice that there are two promises in that verse, not one. He forgives, and He cleanses. Forgiveness deals with the guilt. Cleansing deals with the stain and the pull of the sin itself. Many believers live only in the first half of the verse. They keep asking forgiveness for the same thing and never ask God to wash the desire out at the root. But God offers both. He does not only cancel the debt; He changes the debtor.

John also says this: **"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."**

(1 John 2:1) The aim is that we do not sin. But if we do, we are not thrown out of court. We have a lawyer, and He has never lost a case. **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."** (Romans 8:1)

So when you fall, do not lie in the mud. **"For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again."** (Proverbs 24:16) The difference between the righteous man and the wicked is not that one never falls. It is that one keeps getting up. Say with the prophet, **"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me."** (Micah 7:8) The enemy loves to turn one stumble into a

permanent camp. Do not let him. Get up quickly, confess honestly, receive cleansing fully, and keep marching.

And if you are not seeing victory over a repeated pattern, do not conclude that grace is weak. Ask instead whether you are actively cooperating with grace: through faith, through confession, through cutting off the supply lines that feed the sin, through the help of a trusted brother or sister, and through Spirit-led action. **"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."**

(Proverbs 28:13) Confess and forsake. Both oars again.

Walk in the Spirit

So how does this partnership work out on an ordinary Tuesday afternoon? Paul gives us the key. **"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."**

(Galatians 5:16) Notice the order. He does not say, "Stop fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and then you will be able to walk in the Spirit." He says walk in the Spirit, and the victory over the flesh will follow. The way to stop walking in the dark is not to stare at the darkness and try very hard. It is to walk toward the light.

Walking in the Spirit means keeping that background connection with God open all day. It means listening for His nudge and obeying it quickly. It means saying, many times a day, "Holy Spirit, what are You showing me right now?" and then doing what He shows you. Each small act of obedience is a step. Each step taken in His strength makes the next one easier.

Jesus Himself is our pattern. **"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."** (Hebrews 4:15)

How did He do it? By perfect dependence on the Father. **"I can of Myself do nothing."** (John 5:30) If the Son of God lived in dependence, how much more must we? **"I am the vine, you are**

the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Here is the beautiful balance. Without Him, we can do nothing. But Paul also said, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** (Philippians 4:13) Nothing without Him; all things through Him. That is the partnership. That is the rowboat with both oars in the water. Grace supplies the power. Obedience puts the power to work. And the house that is built that way will still be standing when the flood has passed.

CHAPTER 24

From Defense to Offense: Taking the Spoils

Many Christians picture the church as a little fort on a hill. The walls are high, the gates are shut, and everyone inside is hoping to hold out until Jesus comes back to rescue them. Every so often the devil throws something over the wall, and everyone runs about putting out fires. Then they go back to waiting. It is a picture of survival, not victory. And it is not the picture Jesus painted.

Everything we have said in this part of the book has been leading here. We closed the negotiation table. We took inventory and handed over the keys. We learned that grace does not excuse us but empowers us, and that grace and obedience walk together. Why does all that matter so much? Because a soldier under orders is a soldier who can finally be sent. Offense flows from submission. Now we are ready to go and take the spoils.

Gates Do Not Attack

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus answered with a promise that turns the little-fort picture upside down.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

Think about gates for a moment. Gates are not offensive weapons. Nobody has ever been chased down the street by a gate. Gates stand still. They are defensive structures, built to keep attackers out and prisoners in. So if the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church, who is doing the attacking? We

are. Jesus was not describing a church cowering behind its own walls. He was describing a church pressing against the gates of the enemy's strongholds, and those gates giving way.

Behind those gates are people. Husbands and wives held captive by bitterness, young people bound by addiction, whole neighborhoods trapped in fear, nations locked in darkness. The gates of Hades are not there to protect anything good. They are prison doors. And the church was never meant to sit politely outside them. We are the rescue party.

All Authority, Therefore Go

The basis for this offensive posture is Christ's triumph. We have already seen that at the cross **"having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."** (Colossians 2:15) The enemy has been disarmed. Then, after the resurrection, Jesus gathered His disciples on a mountain and said this: **"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

(Matthew 28:18-20)

The most important word in that passage may be the smallest one: "therefore." All authority belongs to Jesus; therefore go. Because Christ has authority, we are sent. Because Christ has triumphed, we advance. Because Christ reigns, the church does not stay merely reactive. Notice too that He sends us to teach people to "observe all things that I have commanded you." The Great Commission is a Lordship commission. We are sent to make obedient disciples, which is why we must first be obedient disciples ourselves.

This changes the spirit in which we live. Instead of constantly worrying about when the next attack will come, we start to think like ambassadors on assignment. We pray differently, as people sent rather than people besieged. We witness differently. We raise our children differently. We walk into our workplaces differently. We face darkness, not with arrogance, but with a quiet sense of delegated superiority in Christ. **"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."**

(2 Corinthians 2:14) Always in triumph. In every place.

Do Business Till I Come

Jesus told a parable about a nobleman who went to a far country to receive a kingdom. Before he left, **"he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.'"** (Luke 19:13) Older translations put it, "Occupy till I come." Either way, the meaning is clear. The King has gone to receive His kingdom, and He has left us with His resources and a job to do. We are not to bury the money and wait nervously by the door. We are to trade, invest, build and increase until He returns.

When the nobleman came back, he did not ask his servants how safely they had guarded his money. He asked what they had gained with it. The one servant who simply wrapped his mina in a handkerchief and hid it was not praised for his caution. He was rebuked. Defensive Christianity, the kind that only ever protects what it has and never advances, looks very much like that hidden mina.

Occupying territory means taking the ground Christ has won and putting it to work for His kingdom. Your home is territory. Your workplace is territory. Your street, your school, your sports club, your social media account, your circle of friends: all of it is territory. The question is whose flag is flying over it. **"You are**

the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14) A city on a hill is not hiding in a bunker. It is shining out over the whole valley.

Building and Battling

This does not mean believers should become reckless or loud for the sake of being loud. Offense in the kingdom is not about picking fights with people. Remember, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Our offense is aimed at the powers of darkness, not at our neighbors. In fact, much of our offense looks like love: kindness, service, prayer, generosity and truth spoken gently but without compromise.

The church builds and battles, and these two go together. When Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, his workers faced constant threats. So they did something remarkable. **"Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon."**

(Nehemiah 4:17) A trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. That is a beautiful picture of the Christian life. We build people, families and communities under God, and we battle the darkness that tries to tear them down.

Let me give you two everyday pictures. Think of a nurse I will call Teresa. She works long night shifts on a busy hospital ward. She does not preach sermons in the corridors. But she has made it her quiet practice to pray over every bed on her ward as she does her rounds, and to offer a word of hope to any patient who seems open. Over the years, her colleagues have learned that when a family is in crisis, Teresa is the one to call. Several of those colleagues now pray with her before the shift begins. That ward is occupied territory.

Or think of a mechanic I will call Sam. He runs a small garage. He charges honestly, which in his trade is sometimes a kind of

miracle all by itself. He keeps a Bible on the counter and is not embarrassed when customers ask about it. When a young apprentice came to him straight out of trouble with the law, Sam did not just teach him to fix engines. He taught him to follow Jesus. That garage is no longer neutral ground. It is an outpost of the kingdom.

Neither Teresa nor Sam would call themselves warriors. But that is exactly what they are. They have stopped merely defending their own spiritual lives and started enforcing Christ's victory in the places God has put them. **"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."** (Acts 10:38) Going about doing good is warfare when it is done in His name.

Possessing the Land

The book of Joshua is the Old Testament's great handbook on taking territory. God had already given Israel the land. The promise was settled. And yet they still had to cross the river, march around walls and walk on the ground to possess it.

"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses." (Joshua 1:3) Given, and yet still to be walked on. That is exactly our position. Christ has won the victory and handed us the spoils, but we must still walk in and take them.

Sadly, there came a time when the tribes of Israel grew comfortable and stopped advancing. Joshua had to rebuke them: **"How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?"** (Joshua 18:3) Notice the word "neglect." They had not lost a battle. They had simply stopped going. That is the danger for many believers today. The enemy does not need to defeat us if he can persuade us to sit down.

Possessing the land often happens step by step. God told Israel, **"And the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you little by little."** (Deuteronomy 7:22) So do not be discouraged if your street is not transformed overnight. Take one step. Pray for one neighbor. Speak to one colleague. Serve one family. Every step of obedience is a footprint on the land. And like Caleb, who at eighty-five years old said, **"Now therefore, give me this mountain"** (Joshua 14:12), you are never too old, too young or too ordinary to ask God for fresh ground.

And remember what happens to the spoils. When David's men came back from rescuing their families and recovering everything the enemy had stolen, some of them did not want to share with the men who had stayed behind to guard the supplies. David would not have it. **"But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike."** (1 Samuel 30:24) The spoils of war belong to the whole army. When you go on the offense, everyone you love benefits.

Offense Flows from Submission

Before Joshua took a single city in the Promised Land, he had an encounter that explains this whole part of the book. Near Jericho he saw a Man standing with a drawn sword, and he walked up and asked Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" The answer was startling. **"So He said, 'No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?'"** (Joshua 5:14)

Joshua wanted to know whose side the Lord was on. The Lord made it clear that the real question was whose side Joshua was on. The Commander had not come to join Joshua's army; He had come to take command of it. And Joshua, the general of all

Israel, fell on his face and asked for his orders. Only after that did the walls of Jericho fall.

That is the order of the kingdom. Offensive warfare is never disconnected from obedience and holiness. A believer cannot live carelessly and then expect authority to flow without resistance. Christ's authority is exercised by those who remain under His Lordship. So moving to offense does not mean abandoning discipline. It means pressing forward from the ground of submission, righteousness, truth and faith. The soldier on his face is the soldier the gates cannot withstand.

So ask Him today what Joshua asked: "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then get up and go. The gates are standing still. The enemy has been disarmed. The King has said "therefore."

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:37) And one day soon, "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."

(Romans 16:20) Until then, do business till He comes. Build with one hand and battle with the other. Walk on the land and claim it in His name. The spoils of war belong to the King, and the King has told you to go and gather them.

PART FIVE — TRAINED FOR WAR

CHAPTER 25

A Daily Pattern for the Warrior

Ask anyone who has served in an army and they will tell you the same thing: battles are not won on the day of the battle. They are won on the hundreds of ordinary days before it. The mornings of drill. The evenings of cleaning the rifle. The boring repetition that nobody ever films. When the moment of conflict comes, a trained soldier does not suddenly rise to the occasion. He falls back on his training. Whatever he has practiced is what comes out of him.

The same is true for you and me. Truth that stays in a notebook will not help you at three o'clock in the morning when fear comes knocking at the door of your mind. Revelation without rhythm fades. That is why, before we close, I want to gather everything we have seen into a simple daily pattern. This is not a religious chore list, and it is certainly not a way to earn God's favor, because in Christ you already have it. Think of it more like the warm-up a runner does before every race. David understood this when he sang, **"Blessed be the LORD my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, And my fingers for battle"** (Psalm 144:1). God is the trainer. Our part is to show up for practice.

Here are ten practices. Some of them will already feel natural to you; some will stretch you. Take them one at a time and let them settle into your days until they stop being things you do and start being who you are.

Live by the Word, Not by the Weather

The first practice is the foundation for all the rest: live by the Word and not by your feelings. Feelings are like the weather. They change by the hour. Some mornings you wake up feeling as if you could take on the whole kingdom of darkness before breakfast. Other mornings you can barely find your socks. If your spiritual life rises and falls with your emotions, the enemy will simply wait for a cloudy day and walk right in.

Here is the order that will keep you steady: facts come first, then faith, then feeling. The facts are what God has said. Faith is agreeing with what He has said. Feelings eventually follow along behind, like the caboose on a train. Nobody tries to pull a train with the caboose. **"For we walk by faith, not by sight"** (2 Corinthians 5:7). On the days you feel defeated, the fact is still the fact: **"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Corinthians 15:57). Start each day by asking, "What has God said?" before you ask, "How do I feel?" A believer who lets feelings rule will be easy prey. A believer who stands on what is written has solid rock under his feet.

The second practice is to put on the armor deliberately, every morning, piece by piece. Paul did not say the armor would fall on you out of the sky. He said, **"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"** (Ephesians 6:11). The armor is fully provided, but it must be consciously taken up. Nobody walks out of the house accidentally dressed.

So make it a morning habit. Before the phone, before the news, before the emails, take two or three minutes and dress for battle out loud. "Lord, I fasten on the belt of truth today; I will not live in pretense. I put on the breastplate of righteousness, Christ's righteousness, not my own. I lace up the shoes of the gospel of peace; I am ready to go wherever You send me. I lift the shield of

faith over my mind, my family, and everything You have entrusted to me. I put on the helmet of salvation; my hope is in You. I take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And I will keep praying in the Spirit all day long." A young mother named Grace prays it over her children as she buttons their coats for school. Do it however you like, but do it on purpose. Jesus Himself set the example of meeting the Father early: **"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed"** (Mark 1:35).

Guard the Gate and Wear the Garment

The third practice is to train the mind. If pessimism, fear, resentment, and heaviness have become habits, they will not leave just because you read a good book. They must be deliberately replaced. A mind does not become guarded by accident, any more than a garden grows nothing but roses by accident. Weeds come up all on their own. Roses take a gardener. Practically, this means catching the thought before it builds a house. When a lie shows up, something like "Nothing ever changes for me," name it for what it is and answer it with what is written. Paul handed us the filter: **"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things"** (Philippians 4:8). Run your thoughts through that filter several times a day. At midday, pause for two minutes and ask, "What has been trying to dominate my thinking today?" Then answer one lie with one promise. It is a small habit, but small habits, repeated, become walls of defense.

The fourth practice is to keep the garment of praise on. God offers **"the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"**

(Isaiah 61:3). Notice that praise is a garment, something you wear all day, not a costume you pull out of the closet on Sunday. Do not wait until everything feels easy. Praise in the middle of pressure. Praise when accusation rises. Praise when heaviness tries to settle on your shoulders like a wet blanket. David made it his lifestyle: **"I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"** (Psalm 34:1). Praise keeps the atmosphere clean, and a clean atmosphere is a very hard place for the enemy to set up shop.

Choose Your Company and Open Your Mouth

The fifth practice is to cultivate the right relationships. The Bible is blunt about this: **"Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'"** (1 Corinthians 15:33). Faith-destroying words and constant exposure to unbelief have the same effect on the soul that junk food has on the body. A little now and then may not kill you, but a steady diet will leave you weak, sluggish, and sick. What you keep hearing will shape what you believe.

This is not a call to become a hermit. Jesus ate with sinners, and so should we. But there is a difference between the people you reach and the people who shape you. Your closest voices should stir your faith rather than drain it. **"He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed"** (Proverbs 13:20). The same goes for what you watch, what you scroll through, and what you listen to as you fall asleep. Guard what you hear repeatedly.

The sixth practice is to use the Word aloud. Memorize it. Speak it. Answer temptation and accusation with what is written. A sword on the shelf has never defeated anybody. Jesus answered the devil in the wilderness with **"It is written"** (Matthew 4:4), and He said it out loud. God told Joshua, **"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do**

according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). Notice where the Book was supposed to live: in his mouth. Choose one verse a week, put it on a card, and read it aloud every time you see it. In a year you will have fifty-two swords at your side.

Keep Knocking and Keep Close

The seventh practice is to persist in prayer. Many prayers are abandoned on the doorstep of the answer. Jesus told an entire parable for one purpose: **"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart"** (Luke 18:1). Delayed answers do not mean God has lost interest. As we saw with Daniel, heaven may have moved on the first day while the answer is still pushing its way through resistance. So keep standing. Keep a simple prayer list and keep praying through it, even when nothing seems to move. When you are tempted to quit, remember: **"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart"** (Galatians 6:9). Persistent faith has a way of outlasting resistance.

The eighth practice is to remain in fellowship with the body of Christ. Remember, there is no armor for the back. God designed us to stand in ranks, each soldier covering the vulnerable side of the one beside him. A lone sheep is a lion's favorite meal, and the enemy loves nothing more than to isolate a believer, convince him that nobody understands, and then pick him off when he is tired. **"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"** (Hebrews 10:24-25).

So be planted somewhere. Find two or three believers you can be honest with, people who will pray for you and who have your permission to ask you hard questions. And never wound your fellow soldiers. The church was never meant to stab its own people in the back while claiming to fight the devil.

Tell the Story and Remember Who Won

The ninth practice is to testify to what Christ has done. Keep speaking redemption, cleansing, and victory. **"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy"** (Psalm 107:2). Testimony is not nostalgia, a sentimental trip down memory lane. It is active warfare. Every time you tell someone what Jesus has done for you, you remind your own heart that He is faithful, you encourage the one who is listening, and you announce to darkness that it lost again. Tell at least one person each week something God has done, and keep Jesus at the center of it.

The tenth practice holds all the others together: remember always that the war is real, but Christ has already won. **"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"** (Colossians 2:15). Never let your awareness of the enemy's tactics grow bigger than your assurance of God's promises. Some believers become so devil-conscious that they see a demon behind every flat tire. Others become so casual that they forget there is an enemy at all. The warrior walks the road between those two ditches, alert but not anxious, sober but not scared.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Notice that Peter says like a roaring lion. He roars, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah has already prevailed. Then end each day the way you began it, with the Lord. Before you sleep, thank Him for the places where He helped you stand.

Ask honestly, "Where did I obey? Where did I shrink back? What needs to change tomorrow?" Confess what needs confessing and receive His cleansing. Renounce any fear, accusation, resentment, or heaviness that tried to attach itself to you during the day. Then praise Him out loud, speak peace over your mind and your home, and go to sleep like a soldier who knows the war is in good hands. Tomorrow will bring fresh supplies: **"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness"** (Lamentations 3:22-23).

The point is not perfection; the point is direction. You will miss a morning. You will grumble when you meant to praise. When that happens, just get back in formation tomorrow. Paul told Timothy, **"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"** (2 Timothy 2:3). Good soldiers are not the ones who never stumble on the march. They are the ones who keep marching.

In the next chapter I want to take you by the hand and walk you through twenty-one days of exactly that: one truth, one verse, one declaration, and one step at a time. The book you have been reading is about to become your training ground.

CHAPTER 26

The Twenty-One Day Warrior Practice

There is a big difference between knowing about swimming and being able to swim. You can read every book on the subject, memorize the strokes, and draw diagrams of the breathing technique, and you will still sink like a stone the first time you jump into the deep end unless you have practiced in the water. Truth works the same way. It becomes yours when you live it.

So this chapter is different from all the others. Here the book becomes training. For the next twenty-one days you will walk back through everything in these pages, one day at a time. Each day has a short reminder of a truth we have already seen, one scripture to memorize, a declaration to speak aloud, and one action to take before the day is over. That is all. Nothing complicated. We are keeping the cookies on the lower shelf.

Why twenty-one days? Partly because three weeks of daily repetition is long enough for a new habit to begin taking root. But mostly because of Daniel, who stood in prayer for twenty-one days while heaven's answer pushed its way through resistance. Some days you will feel the breakthrough. Some days you will feel nothing at all. Stand anyway. Daniel's answer was sent on the first day.

A few suggestions before you begin. Do each day in the morning if you can, so the truth goes with you into everything that follows. Write the scripture on a card and carry it with you. Speak the declaration out loud, not just in your head; something happens when you hear your own voice agree with God. And if you miss a day, don't start over and don't give up. Just pick up where you left off. This is training, not a test.

It also helps to keep a small notebook beside your Bible for these three weeks. Each evening, jot down one line: what you obeyed, what pushed back, and where you saw God move. You will be surprised how quickly those lines add up. On the hard days, when it feels as if nothing is changing, you can turn back a few pages and see in your own handwriting that God has been faithful all along. Better still, invite a friend to walk through the twenty-one days with you. Two soldiers training side by side will always go further than one, and you will have someone to call when the pushback comes.

Day 1 — Fans or Warriors

Every believer is in this war, whether he likes it or not. The moment you crossed from darkness into light, you were drafted. The question was never whether there is a battle; the question is whether you will sit in the stands with a box of popcorn or step onto the field. The devil is not afraid of casual Christianity. He is afraid of a believer who has decided that his life is no longer his own.

Memorize: **"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"** (Colossians 1:13).

Declare aloud: I am not a fan in the stands. I have been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son, and today I step onto the field as a follower and a warrior.

Today: Write down one area of your life where you have been a spectator rather than a participant, and take one concrete step onto the field before tonight.

Day 2 — Know Your Enemy

The kingdom of darkness is real and organized, with rank and structure. Its favorite strategy is quiet: deception, distraction, accusation, and compromise, until a believer is simply switched

off. But organized does not mean sovereign. It is a judged kingdom resisting its final exposure. We study the enemy's tactics so that we can be strategic, not scared. And remember, your enemy is never the people around you.

Memorize: **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"** (Ephesians 6:12).

Declare aloud: People are not my enemy. I see the real battle, and I am alert, not afraid, because the kingdom of darkness is already judged.

Today: Think of someone who has irritated or opposed you recently. Instead of complaining about that person, pray a blessing over him or her by name.

Day 3 — The Spoils of War

At the cross Jesus did not merely survive the devil; He stripped him. He bound the strong man and plundered his house. Like a Roman general parading defeated kings through the streets, He made a public spectacle of the powers of darkness. The spoils of that victory, people set free, healing, peace, provision, and authority, now belong to the King and to those who walk in what He won. We do not earn the victory. We enforce it.

Memorize: **"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"** (Colossians 2:15).

Declare aloud: Jesus has disarmed every power of darkness. I do not fight for victory; I fight from victory.

Today: List three spoils Christ has already won for you, such as peace, freedom, or forgiveness, and thank Him for each one out loud.

Day 4 — Sons, Not Beggars

Many believers have a vast inheritance sitting untouched in the bank while they live like paupers. You are not a beggar at heaven's back door. You are a son or daughter of the King, seated with Christ and filled with the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Authority over the enemy was given to ordinary disciples, not to a spiritual elite. So stop politely asking the devil to please leave you alone. Sons don't beg.

Memorize: **"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you"** (Luke 10:19).

Declare aloud: I am a child of the Most High God. I pray as a son, not as a beggar, and I walk in the authority Jesus has given me.

Today: Rewrite one of your regular prayers so that it sounds like a child speaking to a loving Father rather than a stranger pleading at the gate. Pray it aloud.

Day 5 — The Name Above Every Name

The name of Jesus is your power of attorney. When you speak in His name, you act on His behalf, like a police officer who raises his hand and stops the traffic, not by his own muscle but by the authority of the badge. But remember the sons of Sceva: the name is not a magic word. It carries power in the mouth of someone who actually knows the One whose name it is.

Memorize: **"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth"** (Philippians 2:9-10).

Declare aloud: Jesus has the name above every name. Every knee bows to Him, and I speak in His name with His authority.

Today: Identify one situation that has been pushing you around. Speak to it directly in the name of Jesus, calmly and with confidence.

Day 6 — The Blood Speaks

Every claim you make in this war stands on the legal ground of the blood of Jesus. When the accuser drags your past into the courtroom, the blood answers for you. It has redeemed you, justified you, cleansed you, brought you near, and made you at peace with God. Satan says guilty; the blood says forgiven. Satan says dirty; the blood says cleansed. Wrong address, devil.

Memorize: **"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7).

Declare aloud: I am redeemed, forgiven, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. No accusation has legal ground against me.

Today: Write down the accusation the enemy uses against you most often. Beside it, write what the blood says instead, and read that answer aloud whenever the accusation returns.

Day 7 — Take Every Thought Captive

The mind is the battleground. A stronghold is very often a lie that has been enthroned, repeated, defended, and acted upon until bondage feels normal. You do not have to entertain every thought that knocks on your door. You are allowed to check its passport. If it does not agree with God's Word, it does not get in.

Memorize: **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"** (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Declare aloud: My mind belongs to Christ. I will not be ruled by lies; I take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Today: At midday, stop for two minutes and ask, "What thought has been trying to dominate me today?" Answer that one lie with one written promise.

Day 8 — Truth Within, Righteousness Over the Heart

The Roman belt gathered up the loose ends so the soldier would not trip. Hypocrisy, pretense, and self-deception are loose ends that will trip you in battle. The breastplate guards the heart, not with your own goodness, but with the righteousness of Christ, and love keeps that heart from turning hard. Honesty and holiness are not decorations. They protect your voice of faith.

Memorize: **"Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life"** (Proverbs 4:23).

Declare aloud: I walk in the truth, and I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ. My heart is guarded, and I refuse bitterness.

Today: Bring one hidden thing into the light, whether a small dishonesty, a grudge, or a secret compromise. Confess it to God and, where it is wise, make it right with the person involved.

Day 9 — Ready Feet and a Big Shield

The shoes of the gospel of peace speak of readiness, carrying a peace that is real in you so that you can give it to others. The shield of faith is not a little round thing for your own head. It is the big Roman shield that covers your whole person and everyone entrusted to you. Faith that rests on God's specific promises puts out the fiery darts before they spread.

Memorize: **"Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"** (Ephesians 6:16).

Declare aloud: I am ready to carry the gospel of peace, and I lift the shield of faith over my mind, my family, and my calling.

Today: Pray over each member of your household by name, deliberately lifting the shield of faith over them. Then look for one opportunity to share God's peace with someone outside your home.

Day 10 — Hope on Your Head, the Word in Your Hand

Hope is the helmet that guards your mind, and pessimism is not a harmless personality quirk; it is a crack in the helmet. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, the only offensive piece of the armor. Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness with three words: "It is written." Know the real thing well and you will spot the counterfeit quickly.

Memorize: **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"**

(Hebrews 4:12).

Declare aloud: My mind is guarded by hope, and the Word of God is my sword. When the enemy speaks, I answer, "It is written."

Today: Catch one pessimistic statement you make today. Stop and replace it, out loud, with a promise from Scripture.

Day 11 — Praying Always

Prayer holds the whole armor together. It is like an app running in the background of your phone; you may be driving, cooking, or working, but the connection stays open. Praying in the Spirit builds you up and lets the Holy Spirit pray through you when you do not know what to say. And remember to watch, and to pray for all the saints, not only for yourself.

Memorize: **"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"** (Ephesians 6:18).

Declare aloud: The connection between me and my Father stays open all day. I pray in the Spirit, I stay watchful, and I stand in prayer for my brothers and sisters.

Today: Set three reminders on your phone. Each time one sounds, stop for one minute of prayer for yourself and for one other believer.

Day 12 — Heard From the First Day

Daniel prayed, and for three weeks nothing seemed to happen. Yet the angel told him that his words had been heard from the very first day. The answer had been sent; it was being resisted. Delay is not denial. Prayer is not begging from defeat. It is enforcing the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Memorize: **"Then he said to me, 'Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words'" (Daniel 10:12).**

Declare aloud: My prayers are heard from the first day. I will not lose heart. Your will be done, Father, on earth as it is in heaven.

Today: Choose the one prayer you have been tempted to give up on. Write it down, date it, and commit to pray it every day for the rest of these twenty-one days.

Day 13 — Expect the Pushback

Very often the first thing that happens after a breakthrough, a new decision, or a fresh commitment is resistance. Jesus came up out of the waters of baptism and walked straight into the wilderness. Pharaoh made the brick-making harder after Moses' first word. Do not mistake the pushback for failure. Many times it is proof that you hit something.

Memorize: **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).**

Declare aloud: Pushback is not defeat. I submit to God, I resist the devil, and having done all, I stand.

Today: Think of a recent setback that came right after you obeyed God. Thank Him that you are on the right track, and recommit to that step of obedience.

Day 14 — When You Fast

Jesus said "when you fast," not "if you fast." Fasting does not twist God's arm. It tunes the believer, quieting the noise of the flesh so that faith can hear clearly, and some breakthroughs come no other way. Fast wisely. If you have a medical condition or take medication, talk with your doctor first and choose a kind of fast that is safe for you.

Memorize: **"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"** (Matthew 6:17-18).

Declare aloud: I humble myself before God, and I hunger for Him more than for anything this world can offer.

Today: Choose one simple fast that is safe for you, perhaps a meal, a day without social media, or an evening without television, and give that time to prayer and the Word.

Day 15 — Watch Your Words

Authority is voice-activated. Your tongue is the small rudder that turns the whole ship. Ground is often lost not through some dramatic attack but through what we say: complaining, agreeing with the enemy's report, careless vows, and gossip. Learn to speak to your mountain instead of about it.

Memorize: **"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit"** (Proverbs 18:21).

Declare aloud: My mouth agrees with heaven. I speak life, not death; faith, not fear.

Today: Go the whole day without complaining. Each time you catch yourself, stop and replace the complaint with thanksgiving or a word from Scripture.

Day 16 — The Garment of Praise

Praise is not only what we do after the victory; it is how the victory is enforced. Jehoshaphat put the singers in front of the army. Paul and Silas sang at midnight in chains, and the prison doors flew open. Praise answers accusation, lifts heaviness, and turns your eyes from the size of the enemy to the majesty of your Commander.

Memorize: **"Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, And a two-edged sword in their hand"** (Psalm 149:6).

Declare aloud: I put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The high praises of God are in my mouth.

Today: Spend ten minutes praising God out loud, especially about the situation that weighs on you most. Do it before you feel like it.

Day 17 — Open Your Mouth

Every believer is a proclaimer. You do not need a pulpit or a seminary degree; you need the gospel and a mouth. Jesus gave us the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. Alongside the Word proclaimed comes the word of your testimony, your own account of what Christ has done for you. The enemy has no answer for a changed life.

Memorize: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"** (Romans 1:16).

Declare aloud: I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God, and I will speak it boldly and with love.

Today: Write your testimony in three short sentences: what your life was like, how Jesus met you, and what is different now. Then share it with one person before the week is out.

Day 18 — Setting Captives Free

Jesus came to proclaim liberty to the captives, and He sends us to carry on that work. Not every problem is a demon. Sometimes it is the flesh, sometimes a wound that needs healing, sometimes an illness that needs a doctor. But where the enemy truly has a grip, Jesus drove him out with a word, and we minister in that same name, never in fear. Afterward the house must be filled with Christ.

Memorize: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Declare aloud: In the name of Jesus I walk free, and I will help others walk free.

Today: Ask the Lord to show you any door you have left open to the enemy. Close it through repentance and renunciation, and fill that space with the Word and with worship.

Day 19 — The Negotiation Table Is Closed

The King of the universe does not sit at a negotiation table with rebels. Jesus is not only Savior; He is Lord, and He is one Person. The centurion understood authority because he lived under authority. Your authority over darkness flows out of your surrender to Christ. So where have you quietly fired the King and taken back the keys?

Memorize: **"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).**

Declare aloud: Jesus is my Lord, not my consultant. Every room of my life belongs to Him, and I hand Him the keys today.

Today: Walk through the territories of your life: money, time, relationships, speech, what you watch alone, and your private decisions. Find one where Jesus is not fully Lord, and surrender it to Him in a specific act of obedience.

Day 20 — Grace That Trains

Some contemporary churches teach a grace that excuses everything and changes nothing. That is a counterfeit. True grace does not lower God's standard; it lifts you into the power to live it. Grace saves you from sin and saves you to good works.

Obedience does not earn grace; it cooperates with it. And when you fail, grace offers both forgiveness and cleansing so that you can get up and walk free.

Memorize: **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12).**

Declare aloud: Grace is not my excuse; it is my power. By the grace of God I say no to ungodliness and yes to Jesus.

Today: The next time temptation comes, say aloud, "Grace empowers me to say no to this and yes to God," and then walk away from it.

Day 21 — Take the Ground

The gates of Hades will not prevail against the church. Gates do not attack; they defend. That means the church is the one advancing. Because all authority has been given to Jesus, "therefore go." Your home, your workplace, and your

neighborhood are territory to occupy for the King until He comes. Today you stop merely surviving and start possessing.

Memorize: **"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 28:18-19).

Declare aloud: All authority belongs to Jesus; therefore I go. I will stand in the evil day, and I will still be standing.

Today: Choose one place, your street, your office, or your extended family, and write down one specific way you will bring the kingdom of God into it this month. Then take the first step today.

The Seven Declarations

When the twenty-one days are over, do not put these truths back on the shelf. Keep these seven declarations close and speak them aloud each morning. They sum up everything we have seen together.

One. Christ has already triumphed over the powers of darkness.

Two. I do not fight for victory; I fight from victory.

Three. My mind belongs to Christ and will not be ruled by lies.

Four. The Word of God is my sword and my authority.

Five. My heart is protected by the righteousness of Christ.

Six. My home and my calling are covered by the shield of faith.

Seven. I will stand in the evil day, and I will still be standing.

Simple Rules for the Twenty-One Days

Finally, here are seven simple rules to carry with you through these three weeks and beyond. Speak Scripture before you speak fear; when the bad news comes, let your first words be God's words. Refuse to agree with accusation; you may hear it, but you

do not have to sign it. Praise aloud every day, whether you feel like it or not. Keep short accounts with God and with people, so that no grudge and no hidden sin has time to put down roots. Guard what you hear repeatedly, because what you keep hearing you will eventually believe. Do not neglect fellowship and prayer; a soldier alone is a soldier exposed. And stay steady even when you do not feel dramatic change. Seeds grow underground long before anyone sees a sprout.

Twenty-one days from now you will not be a finished soldier. None of us is. But you will be a trained one, with the Word in your mouth, the armor on your shoulders, and the habits of a warrior settling into your bones. And on the twenty-second day? Get up, put on the armor, and do it again. Go back to Day 1 if you like, or pick the days that stretched you most and walk through them a second time. The aim was never to finish a program. The aim is to become the kind of believer the kingdom of darkness recognizes and fears, a son or daughter who knows the war is real, knows the war is won, and gets up every morning to enforce that victory.

Conclusion

Remember the Japanese soldier who was still hiding in the jungle of a Pacific island long after the Second World War ended? For nearly thirty years he kept fighting. He cleaned his rifle, guarded his position, and carried out his orders, all for a war that had been finished decades before. Leaflets were dropped telling him it was over, but he refused to believe them. It took a visit from his own former commanding officer, flying out to deliver the order in person, before he would finally lay down his arms.

I think about that soldier often, because there are two kinds of people in that story. There is the man who would not believe the war was over, and there are the people who had to live with him while he kept fighting. The devil is a lot like that soldier. His war was lost at the cross, but he keeps hiding in the jungle, raiding and harassing, hoping that God's people will never figure out what has already happened. And sadly, many believers are like the villagers who lived in fear of a defeated man for thirty years because nobody acted on the news.

That has been the message of this whole book. The war is real. Christ has won it. And now He has sent you and me to enforce His victory.

The War Is Real

We must never pretend there is no enemy. Scripture does not treat the devil as a cartoon in red pajamas or a figure of speech for bad luck. It tells us plainly, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8). His kingdom is organized. His tactics are deliberate. He works through

deception, accusation, fear, distraction, and compromise, and his favorite target is the believer who never quite wakes up to the fact that he is in a war.

So do not be casual. Casual Christians are not neutral; they are simply unarmed. The kingdom of darkness does not honor neutrality, and it does not take Sundays off. A believer who sleeps through the battle will still feel its effects; he just will not understand why.

Christ Has Already Won

But hear me clearly: the greatest truth in spiritual warfare is not the power of the enemy. It is the finished victory of Jesus Christ. The cross was not a partial victory. The resurrection was not a pleasant religious event. It was a decisive takeover. **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"** (1 John 3:8). Jesus walked into the strong man's house, bound him, and carried off his goods. **"But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils"** (Luke 11:22).

So do not be afraid. Fear is the enemy's favorite way of making a defeated foe look undefeated. Do not exaggerate the devil, but do not ignore him either. **"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"** (2 Timothy 1:7). You are not a victim in this war. You are an enforcer of a victory that was won before you ever showed up. We do not fight for victory; we fight from victory.

Enforce the Victory

The victory of Christ was never meant to stay in a doctrine book. It is meant to be lived out on Monday morning, in the kitchen, at the office, in the hospital waiting room, and on the street where you live. So put on truth. Guard your heart with righteousness. Wear the shoes of readiness. Lift the shield of faith over

everything God has entrusted to you. Keep the helmet of hope on your head. Take up the sword of the Word and speak it aloud. Pray through resistance and keep praying when the answer is slow. Praise in the face of accusation. Speak the gospel without shame. Testify to what the blood of Jesus has done for you. Bow your knee to Jesus as Lord in every room of your life. And stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of God, because there is no armor for the back.

None of this is done in your own strength. Grace is not only what saved you; it is what trains you, empowers you, and carries you. **"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place"** (2 Corinthians 2:14). Notice the word always. You are not marching toward a triumph you might lose. You are walking in a procession that has already been won.

The Spoils Belong to the King

Long before the cross, the prophet Isaiah saw what the suffering Servant would win: **"Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death"** (Isaiah 53:12). The spoils of this war belong to the victorious King. Every soul set free, every mind made whole, every home restored, every life brought out of darkness into light, all of it is His.

And here is the wonder of it: He shares those spoils with those who belong to Him and walk in what He has won. Peace that the world cannot explain, freedom from guilt and accusation, authority over the power of the enemy, a family, a future, and a place in His advancing kingdom are not rewards you earn. They are the plunder of a war Jesus fought alone, now placed in the hands of His people. **"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37).

So come out of the jungle of fear. Do not live another day like that soldier, fighting a war that is already decided, or like the villagers, cowering before an enemy who has already lost. The King has spoken. The victory is settled. The spoils are on the table. Step forward, take what Christ has won, and carry it to a world that is still waiting to hear the news.

A Prayer of Praise and Commitment

Heavenly Father, I praise You. Thank You that You have not left me defenseless in a world of spiritual conflict. Thank You that Jesus Christ has already triumphed over the powers of darkness through His cross and resurrection, that He disarmed them and made a public spectacle of them. Thank You that You have delivered me from the power of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of Your beloved Son. I am Yours.

Lord Jesus, You are not only my Savior; You are my Lord. I lay down every argument and every condition. I hand You the keys to every room of my life. Make me one of those believers the enemy fears. Deliver me from fear, passivity, and carelessness, and from every cheap idea of grace that would keep me unchanged. Teach me the true grace that saves, trains, corrects, and empowers. Let Your grace toward me not be in vain.

Teach me to put on the whole armor of God every day. Gird me with truth. Guard my heart with the righteousness of Christ. Fit my feet with the readiness of the gospel of peace. Help me lift the shield of faith over my mind, my family, and everything You have entrusted to me. Keep the helmet of hope on my head, and put Your Word in my mouth as the sword of the Spirit.

Holy Spirit, strengthen my prayer life. Teach me to pray as a son and not as a beggar, to persevere when answers are delayed, and to stand when the pushback comes. Teach me to praise in the middle of pressure, to pull down strongholds in my mind, to proclaim the gospel boldly, and to testify clearly to what the blood of Jesus has done for me. Make my life a light, my mouth

a weapon of truth, my hands instruments of healing and service, and my heart a dwelling place of Your presence.

Keep me from wounding my brothers and sisters. Make me someone who stands in the ranks and covers the backs of others.

I declare that Christ is victorious. I declare that His authority is greater than all the power of the enemy. I declare that I do not fight for victory, but from victory. I choose today to stop living as a spectator. I choose to be a disciple. I choose to be a warrior. May my life bring glory to Your name and carry the spoils of Your victory to everyone I meet. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

About the Author

Picture this: it is 1972, and a young couple steps out in faith, not knowing that their "yes" to God would spark an adventure spanning more than fifty years and touching thousands of lives across several continents. That is where the story of Paul Joseph and his wife, Linda, begins, but it certainly does not end there.

Paul and Linda first spent two decades in Asia, sharing the gospel and making disciples. Then they gave yet another decade to Africa, pouring their lives into displaced communities in the Liberian refugee camps. Through scorching heat and heart-wrenching need, they lived out what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in a broken world, turning places of loss into places of hope and healing. Their work was never only about physical aid. It was about showing people that even in life's darkest hours, the light of Jesus still shines and His victory is real.

Paul's ministry also reaches far beyond the mission field. His pen has become as powerful as his presence, most notably through *Handbook for a Disciple of Jesus*, a practical field manual for anyone serious about following Jesus and helping others do the same, written by someone who has walked that road for over fifty years. His other books, including *Power for the Hour*, *Jesus Beyond Religion*, *Who Do You Say That I Am*, *Beyond the Pew*, and *The Discipline of a Disciple*, along with his daily devotionals, continue to strengthen believers around the world with wisdom forged in real frontline ministry. His writing does not simply tell you what to do; it shows you how to do it.

To explore Paul's complete collection of books and ministry resources, visit faithwithoutborders.us.

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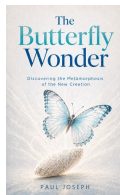
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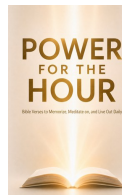
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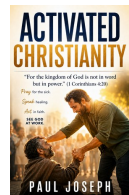
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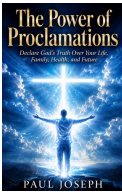
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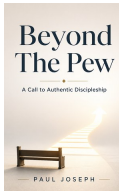
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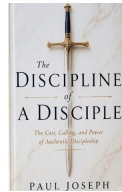
The DNA of the New Man



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THE SPOILS OF WAR

CLAIMING WHAT CHRIST HAS ALREADY WON

The battle is real. But the victory is already secure.

Many believers know that spiritual warfare exists, but they approach it with fear, confusion, or a defensive mindset. They feel as though they are constantly trying to survive the attacks of darkness.

But Scripture teaches something greater.

Jesus Christ has already triumphed over principalities and powers. Through His cross and resurrection, He defeated the enemy, stripped darkness of its ultimate authority, and gave believers the right to stand in His victory.

The Spoils of War is a practical, Scripture-based guide to spiritual warfare for believers who want to move from fear to confidence, from passivity to authority, and from defensive survival to Kingdom advance.

Inside, you will discover how to:

- Understand the reality of spiritual warfare without living in fear
- Recognize the enemy's tactics of deception, accusation, and strongholds
- Guard your mind with truth, hope, and disciplined thinking
- Put on the full armor of God every day
- Use the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit
- Pray with perseverance when resistance delays visible answers
- Lift praise against heaviness, fear, and accusation
- Break strongholds through biblical preaching and testimony
- Move from defensive Christianity to advancing the Kingdom of God
- Stand in the truth that you do not fight for victory, but from victory

The enemy may resist, accuse, tempt, and attempt to intimidate. But he does not have the final word.

Christ does.

The armor is available. The Word is in your hand. The blood of Jesus has spoken. The church is called to stand together and advance.

Stop struggling for a victory Christ has already won.

Take your stand. Claim the spoils. Walk in victory.

PAUL JOSEPH

