



The War of Life

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Today we complete our series on the *Church: Theater of the Gospel*. Week to week we've taken a biblical and practical look at what it takes to be a church that displays the riches of God's grace—a 3D gospel, Sunday liturgy, sacrificial community, costly discipleship, compassionate evangelism, honoring leadership, to name a few. It's not easy. This vision of church will humble and thrill you. It's exciting and demanding. So demanding, it just might squash you, *if you try to do it in your own strength*. Whether you've been here all along or are here for the first time, we all know that life requires strength. Your presence here is an admission of your weakness. You know, deep down, that life requires something of you that you don't possess. You may not be sure what it is? Whatever it is, you know people who lost "it" or never find it, maybe you're searching for it. Our passage from the Holy Scriptures zeroes in on our need for strength in the war of life. The what, the why, and the how for the War of Life.

Strength for War

The pilot of Germanwings flight 9525 lost his nerve this week, his will to live, and deliberately crashed a plane into the French Alps killing 150 people. Strength is essential for living. Without it people break down, develop addictions, diseases and then they die. People don't run forever, and even in the time we have, we vacillate in our strength. Man, I'm really tired this week. I need a break, a vacation. We're not made to run full throttle. People are like cell phones, creative and powerful, but can't run on their own. We have to have a power source, *a strength*, from outside ourselves. Dress the kids, pack their lunches, do the housework, pay the bills, do the homework, cook dinner, and get enough sleep to do it all again? Throw a few disciplinary issues, a conflict at work, some financial challenges; maybe unmet personal goals and you've got *the war of life*. How do we do it? Now, broaden the frame to include spiritual challenges. In our passage: present darkness *and* heavenly places, flesh & blood vs. rulers & authorities, earthly proclamation *and* spiritual powers. Christianity widens the frame; the picture gets bigger, and when it does, we tend to choose one or the other. Like opposing magnets, and we push the spiritual and the material apart. We try to simplify by favoring a frame and draw strength from it. Recoiling from the material, secular frame, some people draw strength from "**spiritual power**." This person elevates spirituality as the solution to every problem. If they face sickness, they try to pray their way out. Face financial challenges? It's because "you don't have enough faith." If you're depressed, just believe this bible verse. Every problem has a spiritual solution. They deify spirituality, and as a result, live on religious pins and needles, trying to please God, do what's right, keep the faith. Their strength comes from their spiritual power. But the backside to spiritual power—*fear*. This person lives life in fear. Am I pleasing God? Have I given enough money? Do I read the Bible enough? I should pray more. The other response is to choose the **secular power**. You know better than to treat physical problems with spiritual solutions. You use your head. Dismiss the spiritual battle, and rely on reason, more money, more time, better staff, strong family values, personal morality, a good app or two and you're good. The professional draws strength from marketing strategy, the mother from parenting methods. But there's a backside to secular power, human limitation. People

blow it at work and it screws up your life balance. Your kids start teething, walking, speaking, arguing; there goes the parenting methods. You face problems you can't reason your way through. Secular power nor spiritual power is enough. Why? Because both rely on an "inner" strength. The person who relies on spiritual power really relies on what *they do* for the God. And the person who relies on secular power relies on what *they do* for themselves. Both are self-reliant. They have no outside power supply. See, it's not inner strength that we need; it's outer strength: [Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might \(10\)](#). This passage advocates **spiritual realism**: it recognizes the spiritual and the material, faith and reason. Let me show you how. There's a clear imperative here: be strong. No wishful thinking. No religion is a crutch. Don't spiritualize it. But in your responsible attempt to be strong, using all of your faculties, be strong how? "In" the Lord, what does that mean? Be strong in the strength of his might (means "resident-ial power"). *God has an inner strength that's so powerful it's unlimited; it just lives in him.* He never recharges, never sleeps. **God wants his inner strength to become our outer strength**; that's putting on the armor of God. "[Put on the whole armor of God \(11\)](#)". There it is again—you put it on—but it's God's armor. No dualism. God flips a magnet over, and the spiritual and material stick together. There's an overlapping of the frames, the frame of heaven over the frame of earth, and you are meant live, thrive, right in the middle not push them apart. Now, this putting is continual; continually wear it. *Don't put the armor of God in the closet and just pull it out for hard times.* Life is war. If you want to be strong, you can't piecemeal it; put the helmet on one week, maybe take a helmet and sword another day. It's the "*whole armor of God.*" It hangs together. The person relying on spiritual power will often treat the armor in pieces. Different ones for when you get stuck. Shield of faith for a job; sword of the Spirit for a rough season; belt of truth to bolster your doctrine. But you're bootstrapping it. You're leveraging God for what you want. Instead of the whole armor of God for his battle; it's piecemeal armor for your preferences. And Satan's arrows cut right through that. That's using God for your mission instead of his. This armor isn't for convenience; it's for WAR! And life is war. "[Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.](#)" The foe is real: "[For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places](#)" (12). Get your head in the game. Stop playing with the magnets. Satan exists to "steal, kill, and destroy." He wants your faith for lunch. And if you're opting for one frame or the other, quite frankly, he's got you. The word *stand* is repeated four times in this passage. Because it's so tempting to run, to secular or spiritual power, to use God.

The Armor of God

The rest of the passage shows us how to stand, have strength. The pieces of the armor follow a progression from protective, defensive, offensive. First, the protective layer: "[Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness](#)" (14). The belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness are necessities for the fight. In Roman armor, the two worked together to form a protective layer over the chest and over thighs, where the belt held a leather undergarment. The two are interrelated. **Truth is related to righteousness.** When you really believe something's true, it creates a kind of righteousness. But when we rely on something other than the truth, a lie

or deceit, we're easily taken out of the fight. For example: A person obsessed with their appearance will have their thoughts consumed with what they eat, how they look, body fat, muscle, working out, fashion. You're thinking, I've got to fit in the swimsuit before summer. This petty obsession, connected to a lie about your worth: *the more beautiful you are the valuable you become*. What they don't tell you about these weight loss TV shows is that some of the candidates become so focused on their personal image they lose their whole family in the process. They're so devoted to beauty that it becomes their truth, and self-righteousness follows. They have to gloat in their new image. When we devote lots of attention to personal beauty, the people around us lose our attention. We end up overlooking basic spiritual needs in our kids, fail to see opportunities to serve and encourage others—why—because we're busy making them serve us, in the silent applause for your mind as witnesses to your progress. Believe a lie and you're zapped of strength, you reduce life to the immanent frame and taken a spiritual beating. You're right where the enemy wants you. **What you believe is true (beauty determines my worth) will produce a certain kind of righteousness.** The gospel has a whole nother take on beauty and righteousness. How? Remember all this armor is God's armor. It originates with God, YHWH, the personal name for God the Father, and in Isaiah 59 YHWH takes up righteousness as a breastplate, girds himself with truth to fight for his people. God's armor is your armor. God's righteousness is your righteousness. Christ's beauty is your beauty. Here's the amazing thing about God's armor. **God's armor should crush us, but it doesn't because Jesus stepped in & made it one size fits all.** No matter how old or young in the faith, God customizes it for you in Christ. *It doesn't weigh you down; it lifts you up.* You're meant to see God calling you to put on Christ. That's what Ephesians is about earlier, to put on the new man (4). Put Christ on; let his inner strength become your outer strength. Stand in him, believe his truth. In the gospel, His beauty becomes your beauty. And then you're ready to fight, with a Katniss Everdeen breastplate, ready to kick some tail. Just think what could happen: *“as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace”* (15). The **shoes** don't fit into a neat category because they transcend categories. In fact, the focus isn't really on the shoes; its on the readiness. Readiness for what? The gospel of peace. This image is also drawn out of the Divine Warrior passages where we see a messenger moving swiftly across mountaintops announcing peace and good news. Readiness keeps your eyes on that prize, on the gospel mission. What's the mission? Peace on earth. That if people will put their faith in Jesus, his reign and rule will breaking into their life and bring them peace, wholeness, strength. His inner strength becomes our outer strength, and we join his mission of making all things new. *The whole world will change because his gospel will never change—the good and true story that Jesus has come to defeat sin, death, and evil, and he's return to make all things new.* With vision like this, your feet will keep moving, and you wont be caught on the sidelines, and you wont piecemeal it because youre eagerly, vitally in the fight. Next comes the defensive pieces. The **shield** of *faith* is essential if we're gonna stay in the fight. Without it a sword or arrow can slip right in. This isn't blind faith; it's eyes wide open faith, looking at and trusting in *the promises of God*. When I've got work to do, and my wife promises she'll be back in one hour to relieve me of the kids, I don't just memorize the promise; I *bank* on the promise. Down to the minute. Faith banks on the promises of God. Not too long ago I encountered some intense discouragement, I'd heard some things about myself, some true - some untrue and I was

tempted to believe them all and throw in the towel, but **Psalm 34** brought me hope: *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears... This poor man cried, and the Lord heard his cry and saved him out of all his troubles"* Reading this promise, I knew that all God required of me was a cry and he would save me. I cried this promise out over and over again, putting faith in his Word and he delivered me. I held up the shield but also lifted the sword: Psalm 35: *Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help! Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers! Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"* I was tempted to save myself, defend my character, and clear my name, put faith in me, but instead I put faith in God's promises, and reminded my soul, *God is my salvation*. If you're not reading God's promises regularly, you won't be acquainted with them. But acquaintance isn't enough; you must put faith in them. **Faith in the promises of God transfers the power of God to the people of God**. And you've got strength to extinguish deceitful darts like: *work for your beauty, lie for your progress, escape for your joy, defend your character*. Without faith in Word of God we will become a casualty of war, opting for spiritual/secular power, unable to help our friends. The final offensive weapon is **prayer**: *"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (18)."* Like "stand" some form of praying is repeated four times. **Prayer is so powerful it doesn't need its own piece of armor. It's pervasive, and like the Word, connects the strength of heaven to the struggles of earth.** *The Word and Prayer are what keep you in the center of what God's doing, the magnetic pull of heaven and earth, you find yourself under a waterfall of God's residential strength*. A couple ways this happens in prayer. First, **adoration**, *"Our Father who art in heaven hallowed (adored) be your name."* When you adore something, a great movie, piece of literature, or a band, your worries fall to the side, but only temporarily. **When you adore something truly great, your worries are put in their place**. They don't dominate you. But you have to truly adore God, and one of the best ways to do this is take the posture of adoration, on your knees, where you're inclined to look up. And then savor God's attributes and recount his good works in gratitude. It helps you realign everything in life under him and you get a sense of peace and strength you can't find anywhere else. Second, **petition**. Notice that this prayer is not only for our perseverance but for all the saints. Pray for others to have strength. Early in my life as a pastor, I would get overwhelmed every few months by all the needs and struggles people had in the church until I began to name each person and situation and hand them over to God by name. The burden would lift and people would be helped. I saw conversions, marital healings, the poor helped. City Life, we cannot live our vision without constant prayer. Pray at the drop of a hat when you hear a need. On the spot with people, public or private, so God's strength can become *our* strength. Drop the knee, regularly, to adore God and see your worries take their place. Adoration and petition drive the mission of God forward and fill you with strength. If we want to see this city renewed, disciples made, God's kingdom come, we have to ask for it. As trembling soldiers on the front lines, we get to look to our Commander, riding out in front of the infantry to give his battle speech. When we train our eyes on the Divine Warrior, everything is put into place. Shivering spines snap straight, weak knees are made strong, fluttering hearts take confidence in the shimmering glory, strength, and victory that pumps through Jesus' veins.



Keep your eyes on Christ, put on the full armor of God, and be strong in the Lord and in the strength of *his* might.