

**“Spiritual Protective Equipment”**  
**Ephesians 6:10-20**

*Series: Made for More Week 6. Made to Win More*

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Conflict. Stories start with a conflict. History is the record of conflicts. Sports are all about contests, competition and conflict. Normally, at this time, America is obsessed with a nationwide conflict: college basketball’s March Madness. Millions fill out March Madness Brackets to predict which teams will make it to the Final Four and the Championship game. Even though sports are cancelled, we still crave friendly conflict. Some miss it so much they create alternate competitions. Like the Disney Movie Brackets. My wife and I had the same two movies in the championship game: Pixar’s Up and the Little Mermaid. I chose Up. She went with the princess – figures.

Conflict is part of life – some is healthy and some horrendous. The worst conflict is war. Every news cast, every leader rightly declares, “We are at war!” CoVid19 is waging war on our family and friends, our cities and states, our communities and country, our globe. This world war is unlike any we’ve ever faced. The battleground is not over there but right here. The frontline and the home front are the same. The enemy is not visible and not human. Despite all our technological advances we, as yet, have no weapon against it. And it spreads through normal interactions between humans – a handshake, a hug, a conversation, a classroom, a meeting, a meal. It causes shut downs, stay at home orders and quarantines. It cripples our economy. It sickens people and, in some cases, it kills. Let’s review CoVid19’s battle strategy:

- It is invisible
- It is inhuman
- It is in every place
- It is in interactions
- It isolates us
- It is indestructible at this time
- It is invasive and destructive

This is how a viral enemy fights.

Yet we have another enemy. We don’t realize we are also in a war against a spiritual enemy. Near the end of his letter to the Ephesians Paul declares,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.  
Ephesians 6:10-12

We are fighting on two fronts – the physical attack of CoVid19 and the spiritual attack of demonic forces. The devil uses the same strategy as the coronavirus: he is invisible, inhuman, in every place, working through our interactions, he isolates us, he is indestructible by us, he is

invasive and destructive to us. The devil tries to get us to fight each another. We must not. Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood humans. The devil twists and bends leaders, governments, institutions, businesses, and even churches to serve his purpose just as the coronavirus uses a handshake or hug to spread. When Jesus rode on the donkey on Palm Sunday, Jerusalem was a swirling cauldron of conflict. Yet Jesus knew his real enemy was not the Pharisees, high priests or Pilate. He came to do battle with sin, death and the devil. His real enemies are spiritual.

Now more than ever we must wake up and see the battle we are in. Your response to spiritual attacks will determine how you deal with this physical attack. Your inner spiritual well-being will impact how you act in this crisis – do you respond with fear or faith, with greed or generosity, with anxiety or assurance? We are at war. But here is the incredible good news: we do not fight alone. This is why Paul tells us to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” God is fighting and winning the war against the evil one. So what do we do?

We need to **Stand Up**. Paul says,

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Ephesians 6:13

Paul does not command us to advance or retreat. He simply tells us to stand up for Christ and hold our position. He couldn't be clearer. Four times in this chapter he commands us to stand. Some Christians run in fear from the devil. Others recklessly charge into spiritual warfare. I was ten when the movie *The Exorcist* came out. A friend of mine said, “My older brother saw it and he was so frightened he started wearing all sorts of crosses. And we're Jewish!”

Paul says to stand where King Jesus places you and hold your ground when the day of evil comes. What might cause you to slip, slide or stumble? The coronavirus gets in through openings like the mouth, nose or eyes and exploits weaknesses in your body. The devil looks for openings and exploits your weaknesses. These are days filled with stress and frustration, irritation and isolation. Where do you feel weak? Where are you starting to slip? Where are you sliding or stumbling into old, unhealthy habits?

- Are you withdrawing into self-pity and depression?
- Are you nursing grudges, stoking resentments, lashing out in anger?
- Are you giving into fear, anxiety and hopelessness?
- Are you medicating yourself with drink, drugs, porn, spending or gambling?
- Are you binge watching, eating, working?
- Are you drifting into doubt?
- Are you making less and less time for God?

These are the signs you are heading for a slip, a slide, a stumble. Just as staying at home is the best thing we can do to stop this virus, taking your stand and holding your ground is the best thing we can do to stop the devil. But you and I cannot fight this spiritual battle with our power alone.

We also need to **Suit Up**. Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:14-17

God gives you a full suit of armor to protect you so you can stand your ground. There is currently a tragic shortage of PPE – Personal Protective Equipment. A nurse in our church tells me they have to reuse their facemasks seven days. There are not enough masks, face shields, gloves and gowns to cover and protect these fighters on the front line. After the service, go to our website for instructions on how to make masks to drop off at hospitals. Now imagine a whole hospital storeroom filled with PPE and yet the medical professionals do not want to use them and consider them unnecessary. We would call that insanity.

That is exactly what's happening in this spiritual battle. God graciously provides SPE – Spiritual Protective Equipment. He gives you a full suit of spiritual armor to protect you against the devil's schemes. And yet followers of Jesus are not using it. Either we don't know it exists or we don't think it's necessary. Using his Roman jailer as a model Paul describes God's S.P.E.

1. This is God's Armor. It's not just the armor God gives. It's the armor God uses to defeat the devil. Each piece tells us what God does for us not what we do for God.
2. This is Protective Defensive Armor. The purpose of each item is to protect you against the attack of the devil. Even the sword is a short sword used more for defense. God is not calling us to fight a holy war. He is protecting us so we can stand our ground.
3. Our Job is to Put on All the Armor. Each piece defends against a different attack of the devil.

The devil wraps you in chains of lies – lies he wants you to believe about yourself.

God wraps you in His Truth - You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:32

The devil accuses and condemns you with guilt and shame.

God declares you Righteousness and Forgiven - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

The devil tries to make you fall to pieces with fear and anxiety.

God keeps you steadfast on the solid ground of His Peace – For He himself is our peace – for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit Ephesians 2:14,18

The devil shoots flaming arrows of temptation at you.

God Faithfully Shields you - No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. I Corinthians 10:13

The devil declares you are a loser, a lost cause.

God proclaims your Salvation and Victory – It is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:5

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 15:57

The devil will do everything he can to keep you from reading the Bible.

God places the Sword of the Spirit, His Word, in your hands. Read it, believe it, use it so you can slice and dice the devil – your real enemy.

The reason why we Stand Up and Suit Up is so we can **Speak Up**. We speak up to God in prayer.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Ephesians 6:18

We need to make time and specifically pray for various groups of people who are struggling and suffering during this war. This week Woodside prayed for Rico Rodriguez who has the virus. When I emailed his wife Beth and asked if there is anything we can do she replied,

“We don't need anything, except prayers!! Woodside and the community have been so comforting!! I know there is nothing anyone can do, but pray!!! Prayer works and he will be home!!!!”

Let's also speak up and share the hope, the joy, the peace, the love of God's Good News with everyone. Speak up through email, text, phone call, letter and social media.

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19-20

No matter how dark the days could be, Paul knows he has a calling and a purpose. Next week, on Easter Sunday, we'll begin a series called More. This Spring, in our worship services and Growth Groups, you'll discover God has More in store for you. We want to help you find your personal calling and live life to the fullest measure. Please invite others to worship online with you.

This week I had a phone call with a dear saint of Woodside – Peggy Wilson. Since Peggy only has one compromised lung, she is one of the most vulnerable members of our community. She wisely began self-quarantining a month ago. Peggy is a lady of great faith and compassion who is always reaching out to care for others. Yet being isolated at home made her feel powerless and unable to do anything. As the weeks of isolation progressed it threatened to make her depressed. Then she read a devotional which stated God has her right where He wants her. God wants her to take a stand in her apartment and to pray. So that's what she's doing. Peggy worked for many years in the grocery store so she is praying by name for people who work in the grocery store. She prays for doctors and nurses she knows. She prays for residents in her retirement community. She prays for those who are sick and those driving trucks. Oh yeah – and she's most likely praying for you. Peggy Wilson is God's Prayer Warrior. Suited up with the Full Armor of God, she is taking her stand and making the devil run.

Let's join her.

Let's stand up, suit up and speak up in prayer with her right now.