

Are You Protected



With God's Armor?

Are You Protected with God's Armor?

How to Suit Up with the Armor of God

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The Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6:10-17

New International Version (NIV)

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Do You Have Your Armor On?

Early this morning before school, my son went out in the rain to take the dog out.

When he came in a little while later, he held up two soaked sneakers for me to see.

“Look what happened to my shoes,” he said with a bit of surprise in his tone.

“Hmmm,” I said, thinking how I could best state the obvious without being confrontational, “you should have worn boots.”

These were his school shoes, and both he and I knew he was in for a soggy day.

Would *you* go out into a yard full of mud without *your* boots? How about a blizzard without your coat, hat and gloves?

Or, what if you were a football player – would you face those muscle-bound giants without your helmet, shoulder pads or yikes! — your athletic cup?

You know, there are spiritual circumstances we face everyday unguarded because we have failed to equip ourselves with the armor of God.

Despite what many people may say or believe, we as Christians do have a powerful adversary in the devil.

This fact is marked clearly throughout scripture, just check out **1 Peter 5:8**: *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

Although we may not see it, there is a spiritual war going on around us. And, although it may be easy to forget and try to ignore, it’s wise to stay alert.

Satan is active in this world and guess who his targets are? You and me.

In **Ephesians 6:12**, it says: *“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.”*

And **Ephesians 6: 11** clearly states: *“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”*

The good news about all of this is that God does not leave us without a way to protect ourselves.

Once again, in **Ephesians 6** (see verses below), it tells us just what we need to do to stay on guard. The trick here is making sure that we dress ourselves in our spiritual armor every day. Just think of my son and his wet feet!

Let me also say that I don’t feel that we need to be looking for the devil’s attack around every corner – our focus should be on the Lord. I’m just saying that we need to be ready and equipped for it when it comes.

I have a picture that hangs in my bedroom that serves as a continual reminder for me to stay God-focused.

In the picture, a prowling lion is approaching the back side of a praying monk.

What I love about the image is the look on the lion's face. The huge, stalking animal's muscles are taut, and it's ready to pounce until it follows the monk's gaze towards the heavens. Instead of a ferocious look on its face, there is a look of fear and submission.

The scripture under the picture comes from **2 Chronicles 20:12** and reads: *"For we are powerless...but our eyes are on you."*

You can tell from the picture that this lion is not going to mess with one of God's kids.

My 2-year-old and I got dressed in our spiritual armor this morning. She giggled as the two of us went through the motions of putting on our belt of truth, our helmet of salvation, our gospel shoes of peace, etc.

Was it just a child's game? I don't think so.

Spiritually speaking, we just may be two of the best dressed girls on the block.

Ephesians 6:13-17

"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. 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.”

Tightening Your Belt



My daughter came home from school the other day and announced that her jeans were a bit too big. Quickly, she came up with her own solution. “I need a belt!” she said, as a little light bulb blinked on above her head.

She ran upstairs to look through the assortment of belts that have been handed down to us over time.

A pink, sparkly one caught her eye, and she came down to show me the effect – perfect! She even brought down a small fuchsia one for her little sister and the

two sported their belts the rest of the day.

I've been thinking about the armor of God found in Ephesians 6 a lot lately. And more specifically, I've been learning about the importance of the belt of truth that Paul talks about in **Ephesians 6:14**: *“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist....”*

But what does this mean really? I know that the armor of God is important because in Ephesians 6:12 the Bible says that we are all engaged in a spiritual battle: “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.”

On our own, we lose in a spiritual war every time.

This is because our puny weapons and shields don't work in this kind of battle.

But take a look at what **2 Corinthians 10:4** says about what God gives us: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”

Pretty cool, huh?

Now, why is it important to put on the belt of truth? What's a belt going to do anyway, right?

Well, if we look back to New Testament times, the Roman soldier's belt was a vital part of his wardrobe.

Not only did the belt hold the other pieces of his armor together, it held the scabbard which carried his sword.

Being without his belt meant that the soldier's body armor would be falling apart, and he would also be weaponless and unable to fight! It's also said that attached to the belt hung protective pieces of leather that covered the soldier's lower body parts.

Hmmm...pretty important I'd say.

Of course today's belts don't do all that, but you know, as I thought about them the other day, I realized that they still play an important role in today's wardrobe.

Let's take loose jeans for example, without a belt, pants can come down and expose our, well more vulnerable areas. And who wants that?

**Now, bring in the importance of the name of our belt - truth.
Without it, our more vulnerable areas are exposed aren't they?**

And what exactly are we exposed to? Lies of course. And who is the father of lies? The devil.

Without truth we are weaponless to fight against the enemy of souls. So, if we don't have our "belt of truth" tightly buckled each day, we will be more likely to believe the devil's lies.

And with that can bring a whole host of trouble.

Trying to fight our spiritual battles on our own is fruitless. Believe me, I've tried.

In one of my favorite books, "The Bondage Breaker," author Neil Anderson says this: "You cannot expose Satan's deception by human reasoning; you can only do it by God's Spirit and divine revelation. Jesus said, *"If you abide in My word,*

then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31,32). Jesus prayed, *“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).* It is critical that when you put on the armor of God you start with the belt of truth (**Ephesians 6:14**). The light of truth is the only valid weapon against the darkness of deception.”

There was a lie circulating around me the other day. Someone was angry with me and was vocalizing some things that I felt weren't true. My own anger began build up, and I was getting ready to lash out, when God reminded me of one thing: truth.

Regardless of what was being said about me, the truth remained the same.

Sort of like my belt of truth – it was unchanging. It felt pretty freeing to realize this. I didn't have to get all bent of shape defending myself. Not when I had the truth on my side.

Christian, without your armor you are an easy target. Let's “suit up” everyday starting with the belt of truth.

Proverbs 3:3-4 (King James Version)

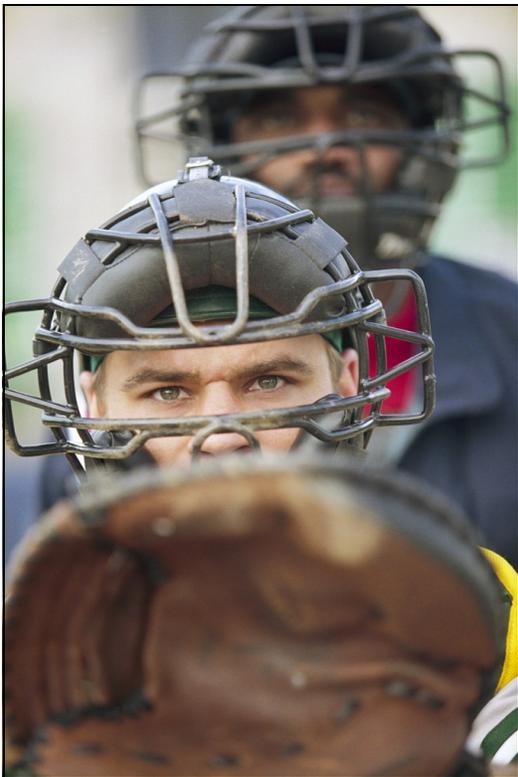
Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

2 Timothy 2:15 (Amplified Bible)

Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth.

John 14:6 (New International Version)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.



Facing It Head On

The score was three to nothing as the catcher took his place behind the plate.

His chest protector, shin pads and mask were all in place.

He got ready for that perfect pitch that would help even up the score for his team.

One strike had already been thrown, and as he crouched, he hoped for another swing and a miss.

The screaming fast ball was low and inside, and it looked like it would be another strike. But the batter swung and foul tipped the ball off his bat, sending the ball back to the catcher in a frenzied blur that caught him off guard.

It was then that the catcher made an unthinkable error. Instead of relying on the sturdiness of his gear, he turned away from the on-coming ball.

Twisting his body in a flinch, he gave the missile a place to land on his own soft flesh.

They heard the thud all the way in the dugout, and, looking out to home, the team could see their man down behind the plate.

“How could he have gotten hurt with all that padding?” I wondered when I heard the news about my son. What I learned was that when he turned away from the ball, he exposed his rib cage. Thankfully, nothing was broken, but the ball’s seam left an angry mark on his skin.

When I thought of my son facing that ball, my mind raced to scripture and straight to the armor of God – particularly, I thought of the breastplate of righteousness that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6:14.

As Christians, we are to wear the breastplate boldly, understanding that it’s only because of Christ that we have right standing with God. And it’s our faith in Christ, not our works that gives us the privilege to stand before our maker.

Who could make it any other way? I know I couldn’t.

The Living Word Library's website explains it this way: "The breastplate covers the chest. In our case the breastplate is made not of iron but of righteousness. A soldier with his breastplate on goes boldly into battle full of confidence. Righteousness allows us to stand before God, men and demons."

The website also explains that having righteousness means that, as Christians, we are justified, and we don't have to come under condemnation.

It says: "Without the breastplate of righteousness our faith would be like any mere religion - a form of godliness but no power to act. Satan would knock us down with one word of condemnation. Nor would we have the boldness to go before the throne room of God's grace."

Pretty important piece of armor isn't it? So, what happens when we make a move like my son did behind home plate? When attacked -- what if we flinch, or simply try to turn and run? We can expose ourselves to Satan's attacks can't we?

For too many years, I had no idea what it meant to truly be a victorious Christian.

Like my son, I would turn away from Satan's attacks and expose by human frailty.

I'd simply become a sitting duck for any of his daily evil schemes.

It wasn't until I really studied God's word and sought him concerning my particular "weak spots" that I began to really understand who Christ was and what his work on the cross did for me. I began to grow in the knowledge of who I was in Christ.

And that was life changing.

Today, Satan's attacks still come. But you know, facing them head on with the armor of God securely in place is so much more effective than flinching in fear.

I'm not perfect at it, but when I do get zapped, I know where my mistake was and the next time, with the help of Christ, I'm ready to face it head on.

Romans 8:1-4 (New American Standard Bible)

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:10 (New American Standard Bible)

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (New American Standard Bible)

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Put On Your Gospel Shoes



The pain in my upper back was becoming unbearable. It was a gnawing ache that began about midday and was only relieved by lying down, or a good session in our massage chair.

I hated having the pain -- it slowed me down. And what's worse, I had no idea what was causing it.

At first, I figured it was poor posture, and I tried to discipline myself to roll my shoulders back and sit upright. But other than making me look a little taller, it didn't really work. I also tried all sorts of stretches and was even considering going to a chiropractor.

And when I spoke to my nine-year-old about it, she patted my shoulder and gently told me, "Your just getting old, mom." Ha! I hoped that wasn't it.

One day, a light bulb went on over my head, and I began to wonder if it was my shoes.

Hadn't I heard somewhere that shoes could be related to back pain? I wondered about my comfy "Crocs." They had been my favorites for three years now, but maybe they were the culprits.

My parents were in town that week, and I decided to question my dad about it.

"Of course," he was quick to say. My dad had spent a good part of his life delivering packages for UPS, and he knew that good, solid shoes were crucial to a productive day's work.

"Whenever I started getting pain in my back," he told me, "I knew it was time for a new pair of shoes."

A thorough examination of my Crocs showed big wear marks on the heel. Ahh...who knew that wearing the wrong kind of shoe could trigger pain nearly three feet up? Not me.

Today, I know that putting on the right pair of shoes is crucial to my productivity. If my back feels good, I feel good and, well, things just seem to get done with a smile.

In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to daily put on our spiritual armor. He includes valiant forms of defense like: the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith and the sword of the spirit.

But Paul is careful not to forget our feet. He too knew the importance of a good pair of shoes.

In Ephesians 6:15 he said: “For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared (NLT).”

Kind of odd to think that shoes should matter so much, but after my experience this month, I understand their significance a little more clearly.

I once attended a church that went through a major split. There were Christian brothers and sisters carrying weighty opinions on two very different sides of the proverbial fence. It was a tough time for all of us, and many, including my family left to find fellowship elsewhere.

But you know, a lot of relationships are torn in a church split aren't there? And sometimes, even families find their own members carrying two very different opinions.

What is there to do?

I think Paul would remind us to put on our gospel shoes.

Though Christians may differ in opinion and break fellowship, there is still a bond of heritage that we can't ignore. We have the same Father after all.

One day, while dropping off one of my sons, I saw a woman from our former church sitting in the parking lot. I knew then and there that I had a choice. I could pretend I didn't see her and make a beeline for my vehicle, or I could show kindness.

My feet, snug tight in my gospel shoes, made their way over the pavement to the woman's car. We had some friendly chatter, and I left feeling better for my visit.

In his blog, “Holy Spirit Interactive,” Aneel Aranha says this about the gospel shoes: “If you see a man walking in peace among his brothers, spreading the word of God with love, you will know that the gospel shoes that he wears is a perfect fit. If, however, you come across a man who cannot live in amity with his brothers, and is always engaged in doctrinal or theological conflict, you can be certain that he is wearing the wrong shoes.”

Hmmm, I like that.

And, I bet you can guess where I’m going soon right? Well, do a little shoe shopping of course!

And daily, I’ll also slip on the gospel shoes of peace, remembering their significance in my day-to-day role as a peacemaker in my family of Christian believers.

Romans 16:20 (New International Version)

*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

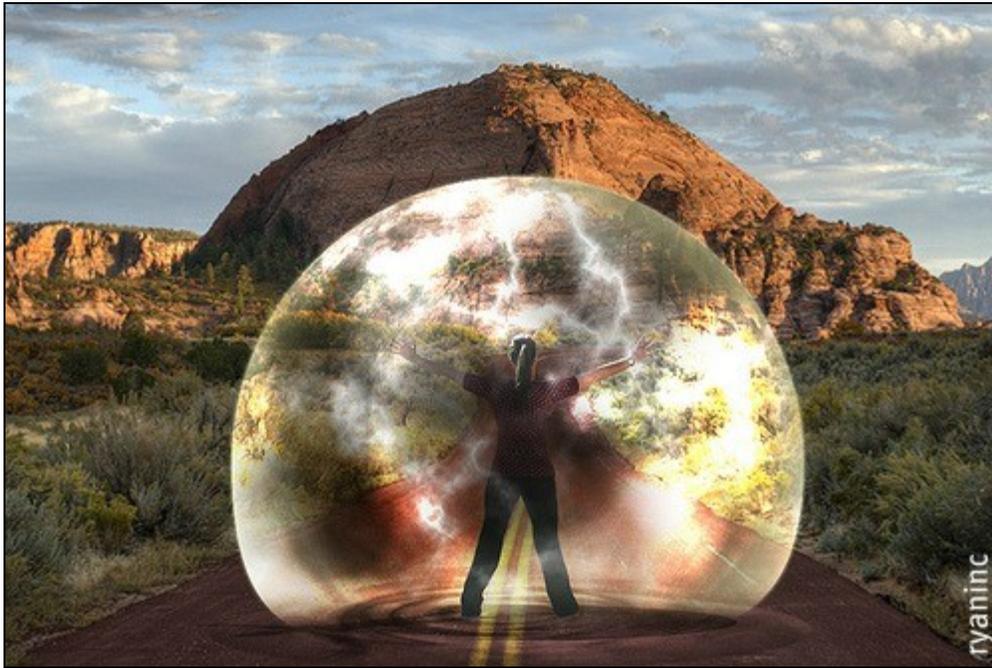
Isaiah 52:7 (Amplified Bible)

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, Your God reigns!*

Matthew 5:9 (American Standard Version)

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

Faith's Force Field



I was wracking my brain last week, trying to come up with just the right metaphor for the protective shield of faith, when suddenly, I saw it in my mind's eye.

As I walked across our deck, there was a sort of glowing, shimmery bubble surrounding our home.

Ha, that was it! Of course – a force field!

My thoughts then raced to one of our favorite Disney movies, “The Incredibles.”

The movie featured a superhero family that was trying its best to “blend in” to society. No longer wanted as superheroes, they were forced by the government to hide each of their gifts that made them, well, “super.”

Bob, the dad, had amazing strength that enabled him to rescue people from burning buildings and Helen, the mom, had the gift of elasticity that gave her the ability to stretch out and grab her kids at full speed.

(Something as a mom, I’ve often admired!)

The brother, Dash, is, as you could’ve guessed by his name, super fast. Another brother is awaiting his gift. And the sister, Violet’s gift, was where my glowing, shimmery bubble image came from.

Because Violet, well, she’s the one gifted with the shielding force field.

At the beginning of the movie, Violet is an unhappy teen who’s trying hard to blend in with the “normal” kids around her. She knows little of her suppressed gift and uses it only in squabbles with her brother.

It isn’t until Violet and her family are faced with an enemy that threatens their lives that she begins to realize the magnitude of her gift.

There is a moment when Helen is flying a plane attacked by missiles that she screams for Violet to use her force field. Violet, unaccustomed to her mom asking her to use her gift, spits and sputters out a tiny force field that eventually fails.

The plane is struck down over the ocean, and it’s only because of their mom’s amazing elasticity that the kids are parachuted safely to the ocean and later floated to shore by an amazing elastic-boat-mom

Violet later apologizes for her failure and her mom says: “Doubt is a luxury we can’t afford anymore, Sweetie. You have more power than you realize.”

Have you ever felt like Violet? I know I have.

There was a time in my life when my own “force field,” the shield of faith, a vital part of the armor of God written about by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6, was weak and full of holes.

The Bible says that with the shield, we can “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Now, are they real arrows? No and yes. They aren’t real in the sense that we can see them like the missiles attacking the superheroes jet in “The Incredibles” movie – but they are real in a spiritual sense.

The Bible is very clear on the fact that as we live in this earth, we’ll always face spiritual opposition.

It’s not “if” you are attacked by the enemy, but “when” you are attacked.

This is very clear in Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

That’s why the Apostle Paul instructs us to put on our spiritual armor daily.

I knew that my shield of faith needed some repair because it seemed as if the evil one’s “flaming arrows” quite steadily seemed to meet their mark – right at my heart.

Like Violet, I’d try to put up a weak-kneed shield that more than once fizzled.

Why? Well, I think I was seriously lacking in the faith area. I didn’t always believe that scripture was true – or that God was who he said he was.

So, how could I hide under a covering with those kinds of holes?

It’s been a long journey and I’m not quite “there” yet, but I can honestly say that through Bible study, Christian fellowship and prayer – my faith has been strengthened and consequently, so has my shield.

In “The Incredibles” movie, the young Violet grows in believing in her abilities. And she rescues her family more than once with her strong and unyielding force field.

Is your shield in good repair today? Remember, “doubt is a luxury we can’t afford.”

Psalm 3:2-3 New International Version

Many are saying of me,
“God will not deliver him.”
But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

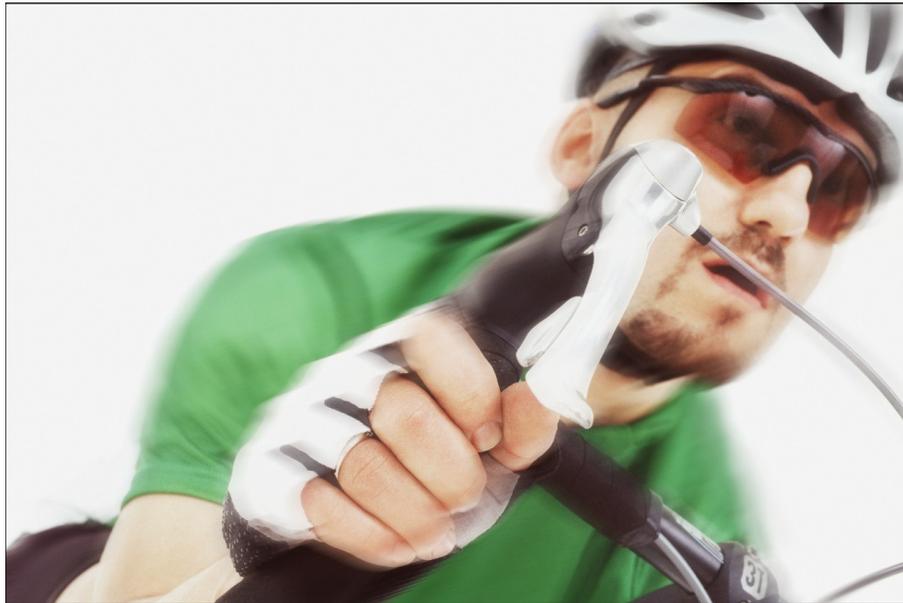
1 Peter 1:5 New International Version

who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

2 Samuel 22:3 New Living Translation (NLT)

my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
He is my shield, the power that saves me,
and my place of safety.
He is my refuge, my savior,
the one who saves me from violence.

The Helmet Of Salvation



I can still hear the snapping and crunching of metal as the young team of bicyclers hit the curve way too fast on the steep downhill.

Time stood still for me that day as I watched, horrified, as several of the bike

riders flipped through the air and landed with a thump on the hard ground.

I was a young teen then, and I had been having the time of my life on the church youth bike hike. We bikers were separated into groups according to our ability.

My group being, well, the slowest, got to leave camp first that day. The others would soon catch up we knew. Maybe that's why we took the hill too quickly ourselves.

A boy riding faster than us in our group was the first to go down on the curve. We stopped on the shoulder of the road, anxious to help.

Parking our bikes on the sharp bend was our first mistake. The second was not considering how fast the group behind us would be hitting the curve with our bikes now in their path.

Miraculously, no one was killed. A few of the boys had broken arms and my brand new, cherry-red Raleigh was quickly declared unridable. Its wobbled tires and newly crushed frame made it look like it belonged in the circus.

The scary thing was that the incident happened before bike helmets were mandatory.

Somehow our church had acquired some hand-me-down helmets from a hockey team and passed them out to some of the kids as a precautionary measure.

One of the boys who had flipped through the air came up to me just after the accident. With a cracked hockey helmet and bleeding head, he sweetly apologized to me for wrecking my bike.

The memory of this whole incident and more specifically the image of the boy's cracked helmet is burned in my mind.

And, as I was thinking the other day on the armor of God and the helmet of salvation mentioned in Ephesians 6:17, that picture of the boy with the cracked helmet came racing back to me.

The Apostle Paul says quite clearly in Ephesians 6 that we are to guard ourselves in the spiritual battle that is happening all around us.

Daily putting on our “spiritual armor” is an important element to victory in life – I believe this with all my heart.

But what exactly is the helmet of salvation anyway?

I'll admit that I've never really stopped to study what this part of armor really did for me.

A little research showed me that the helmet covers a vulnerable part of our body – our head.

We can get a broken arm or leg and survive but a head injury can be a whole different story.

I'm hearing the word “concussion” a lot in youth sports lately. No matter the sport, it seems that kids are suffering more and more from this type of injury.

And, as you probably already know, concussions are not an easy fix. I have a friend whose son has dealt with symptoms of extreme headache, dizziness, confusion and lack of concentration after taking an elbow to the temple during basketball practice in November.

He's healing, but things are still not back to normal.

**And, think about it, what else does the helmet cover? Our mind!
Who wants to leave this exposed to Satan's lies? Not me!**

In church last Sunday, we had a guest speaker who said this: "Our mind is the battlefield. That's where Satan attacks us more than anywhere ..." I couldn't agree more.

It's also interesting to note that Paul calls this the helmet of "salvation." Easily, we can forget who we are in Christ and where we are headed when our lives are over.

We can get discouraged, believing the lie that all is for nothing. What a comfort it is to be reminded of our salvation. Knowing who we are in Christ and being assured of our eternal destiny can get us through even the toughest of times.

How many of us are going around with cracks in our helmet? Or worse yet -- no helmet at all?

Let's put safety first! Wearing your helmet can save your life – you never know when you'll hit a curve in the road ahead.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 (New Living Translation)

But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

John 10:28 (New Living Translation)

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,

Ephesians 1:13-14 (New International Version, ©2010)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Finding Your Sting



My friend's brightly colored yard sale signs beckoned me last summer as I drove my son to the ballpark. Oooh, I thought, I might just have a few minutes....

I remembered the message my friend had sent a few days before, telling me of the sale. Her boys were a few years older than mine, the perfect age difference for some great garage sale fodder.

And surveying the toy table, I was mesmerized by the similarities in interests that her boys had with mine. It reminded me of a time when my boys were younger, and our house was filled with Legos, Matchbox cars and plastic dinosaurs.

On the table, there was Tarzan of the jungle and some great Jurassic Park dinosaur sets, and they even had a nearly complete set of Lord of the Rings figurines.

But what really caught my eye, was a small, chunky sword with “elvin” writing on its plastic blade.

“Oh, you have Sting!” I exclaimed with joy as the memories came in like a flood.

Being a big Lord of the Rings fan, I first heard of Sting when, as a teenager, I read through J.R.R. Tolkien’s book, “The Hobbit.”

You see, Sting was a small knife that the hobbit Bilbo found in cave that had been inhabited by trolls. Because Bilbo was short in stature, the blade made a fine sword for him.

It was crafted by elves and had the unique quality of turning blue whenever the enemy was near – warning its bearer of danger.

Bilbo fought many a battle with the mighty Sting as his trusted and reliable weapon. And, in Tolkien’s later “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, he bequeaths it to his nephew Frodo who also used for protection in his own adventures.

Growing up, my boys were big “Lord of the Rings” fans. They not only got to read the books like I had, but also got to see them come to life on the big screen.

And you can probably guess that we had our own “Sting” in our house when the movie’s toys started hitting the shelves. The plastic sword made metal “clanking sounds” during a good battle and, of course, it had a glowing blue tip.

I’m not sure where our Sting ended up, but I’m sure it was probably worn out by the time we were done with it!

But now, after all these years, I had discovered Sting again, and of course ... I snagged it.

J.R.R. Tolkien's mysterious lands of Middle Earth may have been fictitious, but like Bilbo and Frodo, we daily we face our own battles don't we?

It's good to be aware that many of these battles are fought on the "spiritual level" as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

It's difficult to imagine this sometimes isn't it? After all, it's not something we can see and touch. But – don't be fooled. The Bible is very clear on its existence.

To defend ourselves in this battle, Paul instructs us to daily put on the Armor of God mentioned also in Ephesians 6.

Although most of our spiritual armor has defensive purposes, there is one offensive weapon – the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. In a sense -- our very own Sting.

Now, don't get me wrong, I know that the word of God is far more powerful than any made up sword, but you get the picture.

It's ours to pick up and use just like Bilbo used his and the cool thing is ... it works.

In fact in **2 Corinthians 10:4** it's described as being "divinely powerful."

Jesus used Scripture in his own battle with Satan in **Matthew 4:1-11** when he was tempted in the desert. It amazes me that each time the devil tempted him, Jesus

just brought out his sword, and Satan was shot down every time.

If you haven't had much practice with this incredible weapon, it's time to put it to use. It's an effective way to gain victory over the lies of the enemy.

- Feeling depressed? The joy of the Lord is your strength. (**Nehemiah 8:10**).
- No way out? God will make a way to escape (**1 Corinthians 10:13**).
- Worthless? You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:22**).

You get the picture. Pick up your Sting!

2 Corinthians 10:4 New American Standard Bible

for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

Hebrews 4:12 New International Version

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Isaiah 55:11 New King James Version

*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.*

The Rope of Hope



When our boys were little, we managed a tight routine. We'd have our daily rituals of washing up, brushing teeth and an attempt at a healthy breakfast. And often, we'd put on the Armor of God together.

As you can probably guess, my young soldiers in Christ loved "suing up" for battle.

Once, a friend had lent us the Armor of God "kit" that had a "real" shield, belt, helmet, etc. They were plastic pieces that were even labeled appropriately. I still have pictures of my little warriors looking very serious in full gear.

My boys even had some extra, unorthodox pieces of equipment that they “tacked on” to the list.

One of their add-ons was the “rope of hope.”

Now, if you go to Ephesians 6, where Paul talks about the armor, you won’t find this piece written there.

But you know what? My boys weren’t far off in their thinking because the message of hope is embedded throughout scripture.

The fact is, a clear grasp of hope is sometimes the only thing that gets us through trying times. It can be a lifeline in a sea of despair.

And the funny thing about hope is it that, when we match it with faith, we can have victory even when we’ve got a stubborn problem.

I have a friend who’s had it rough for a long, long time. She calls me every now and then, not expecting pity or even a sermon. She’s just eager for a listening ear and a bit of understanding.

It’s been a long haul for her and every time she calls me, it seems that her situation gets more and more bleak.

When I answered the phone last week, I could tell by the sound of her voice that she was in the pit despair. She’s done all she knows to do and has not seen change.

After I hung up with her, I realized what she needed. You can guess right? A good measure of the rope of hope.

She could use the peace that comes when we rest in hope even when our problems rage.

This reminds of the 23rd Psalm and its imagery of being cared for by a loving Shepherd.

With him we can lie down in green pastures, walk beside still waters, even sit down to a feast with the bad guys looking on. The Psalm says that even in the worst of it, in the “shadow of death,” he comforts us.

Maybe it’s just me, but I don’t think the message of Psalm 23 is a promise of a pain-free life – but instead, it’s an assurance of God’s faithfulness.

Storms may be raging around us, but when we stay under the Shepherd’s care, trusting in him, we can be at rest.

Even in the toughest of times, he’ll never leave our side. I believe there’s a message of hope here.

If you’ve read the Book of Job, you know that God’s kids are not immune to the bad stuff. According to the Bible, Job, “*a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil*” had his life torn down around him overnight.

His ten children were killed and his riches were stolen. Even though Job had plenty of excuses to turn his back on God, he had this to say: “*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him*” (**Job 13:15a**).

I read this recently from Barbara Johnson, Christian author and speaker: “God knew Job’s heart. God knew Job would cling to him no matter what. Similarly, we must hold fast to God, allowing our afflictions to not break or embitter us but to push us closer to the Father. I like to say my heart is wallpapered to God, never to be separated or torn away. The wallpaper paste that holds me there is hope.”

The late Barbara Johnson, author of humorous, encouraging books like, “Stick a geranium in your hat and be happy,” faced a great deal of tragedy in her own life. But, because of her decision to cling to hope, she was able to minister to millions through her writing and speaking talents.

When I was a little girl, I remember seeing a poster in our school library that read: “When you’ve come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.”

I think keeping a firm grip on the “rope of hope” no matter what we are facing is worth all the effort in the world. Don’t you?

Psalm 71:5-6 (Amplified Bible)

For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my trust from my youth and the source of my confidence. Upon You have I leaned and relied from birth; You are He Who took me from my mother's womb and You have been my benefactor from that day. My praise is continually of You.

Psalm 39:7 (New Living Translation)

And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you.

Isaiah 40:30-31 (New International Version, ©2010)

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

The End

...For now ;)

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