

WINNING THE BATTLE FOR YOUR FAMILY BLOGS

Based on 2019 Marriage Retreat

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(These are blogs about spiritual warfare and marriage/family, taken from material I presented at a marriage retreat, Winning the Battle For Your Family, in 2019)

SATAN HATES MARRIAGE

Satan hates marriage. He hates Christian marriages in particular because they have the potential to show the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). By hurting Christian marriages, Satan hinders their witness to the world. He knows that whoever owns the family owns the future. He didn't bother Adam until he got married, then he went after them both!

Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). As such he blinds and deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He is the head of a vast, powerful organization that opposes God and all he stands for. Jesus decisively defeated Satan and his domain by the cross and His resurrection (Ephesians 1:19-20; Colossians 2:15). However, he is still free to oppose God and His people. To withstand these attacks we must understand God's design for marriage and the family, Satan's strategy against it, and how to stand firm to have victory. That's what this series of blogs will be about.

Unfortunately, books about marriage seldom include spiritual warfare. Andreas Kostenberger said, "Regularly the focus (in marriage books) is on fulfilling one's partner's needs in marriage, improving one's communication skills, or resolving marital conflict. From reading any of these books, one would never know that spiritual warfare is a vital issue in marriage and the family. Yet, in fact, spiritual warfare is an all-encompassing reality." Spiritual warfare is often completely ignored by most marriage counselors and popular treatments on marriage. Yet it has been a part of male-female relationships since Satan attacked Adam and Eve.

Remember, though, that not all marriage problems are spiritual warfare problems. Spiritual warfare is one tool God gives us in our collection of tools for victory in life. It is a great tool when needed, but no one tool does everything. If you were making a table you'd need a hammer, saw, sandpaper, paint brush, etc. No one tool alone would do all that is needed. Each is needed. If you tried to use a hammer for cutting wood, or a saw to hammer nails, you would fail. Spiritual warfare is one tool in our marriage tool belt. It is an essential tool, but not the only one. Other tools include communication, showing unconditional love, conflict resolution, forgiveness, sacrificing for others and showing respect. Spiritual warfare isn't the only tool we need to have a great marriage, but when it is needed no other tool will do. These blogs will be about learning how to use the tool of spiritual warfare to have a better marriage and family.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

How competent are you with the tool of spiritual warfare? Do you know when to use it, and how to use it? Ask God for wisdom and insight as you apply His truths to your marriage.

SATAN ATTACKS MARRIAGES

Satan has been attacking marriage since the beginning. God planned for marriage to be a permanent union of one man and one woman for their whole lives. Satan attacks every part of God's plan. He sows doubt that God's way is best (Genesis 3:1). He used one mate to get another to sin (Genesis 3:6). As a result they blamed each other (Genesis 3:12-13). Remember, the enemy of your marriage is NOT your spouse, regardless of whatever they may be doing wrong. The enemy of your marriage is God's enemy, Satan and his kingdom.

Satan attacked God's plan of one man and one woman with multiple wives (Lamech, Genesis 4:19; Abraham, Genesis 16:3; David, 1 Chronicles 3:1-9). He attacked one man one women with homosexuality (Genesis 18:16-19:28) and the permanency of marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Marriages of believers and unbelievers brought idolatry into the nation. Sex outside marriage became common (Samson, David, etc.).

He continues to attack marriage today. He will exaggerate your mate's failures and inadequacies, put suspicion in your mind, focus on your self-pity and self-centeredness and provide you with thoughts that someone else would be a better mate. How can you know when your marriage is attacked? Here are some signs of problems in your marriage. They could be caused by the flesh, the enemy or both.

1. Lack of fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of love, joy, peace, patience, etc., there is conflict, impatience, anger and hurt.
2. Self-centeredness. One or both people focus on themselves and what they can get out of marriage. It's all about meeting their needs and what the other does wrong. The relationship is neglected.
3. Unforgiveness. Resentment and bitterness grow and are shown. Anger and conflict are common
4. Weak spiritual life. Reading the Bible and praying, separately or together, is uncommon. When it is practiced it is weak and ineffective.
5. Picking at little things. Either or both get irritated at little things the other does or doesn't do. Minor faults are pointed out and remembered.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Do you see any of the symptoms of marriage problems in your relationship? Which ones?

Is the problem caused by the flesh (sin nature in each of you) or the enemy (Satan) – or both?

What must you do about it right away to correct it?

THE ROOT OF MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

At their root, virtually all marriage problems are individual problems which affect the marriage. Leaving the current mate and marrying someone else does not keep the problem from reoccurring. When Biblical counsel, trying harder, and doing all the right things to help a marriage do not work, then it could be something demonic is affecting one or both partners and therefore the whole marriage.

If your parents, siblings or other relatives are struggling with the same issues (personal or marriage) and you can see a pattern in your family of origin, it certainly could be something demonic that is passed down family lines. If so, that needs to be confessed and broken in Jesus' name.

Is there unconfessed sexual sin in your life now or in your past? Sex forms oneness between those involved, even if there isn't emotional attachment (1 Corinthians 6:16). Emotional bonding without sex can also form an emotional/spiritual oneness between people. If one of the people involved is open to any demonic activity then those demons can and often will claim access to the other person as well. This oneness, physical or emotional, needs to be confessed and broken. Any access any demons claim from it must be removed and put under the blood of Jesus. Those demons must be commanded to be gone forever in Jesus' name.

Individual sin can also open the door to demons affecting not just the individual but the marriage and family. This includes things like anger, fear, lust, pornography, romantic fantasies, greed, etc. These may also have roots in your family line and that must be taken broken in Jesus' name as well. Even when the sin comes down through the family line, when you commit it you are personally guilty and that must be confessed and renounced (1 John 1:9). Then the demons must be commanded to be gone in Jesus' name.

Unforgiveness, bitterness, revenge, criticism and the like all open the door to demonic attack (Ephesians 4:26-27; Matthew 15:19-20; etc.). The person needs to be forgiven and the opening closed by Jesus. Demons with access must be commanded to be gone in Jesus' name.

To have victory we must repent of sin and confess it (1 John 1:9), putting it under the blood of Jesus. If it is ancestral we must break that in Jesus name as well, claiming our oneness with Jesus as of first priority (2 Corinthians 5:17). If it is from an unbiblical bonding that, too, must be broken. These things close the door that lets the demons in to work. But the demons already with access will still be there so the second step is to make sure they are commanded to be gone in Jesus' name. Close the door and then empty the room. Then the room must be filled with God's present – that will be what the next blog is about.

John 10:9-10 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

If God is showing you any of these are active in your life or your marriage, pray for wisdom and courage, then attack them as described in the blog. Pray with your mate if at all possible.

OCCUPY THE CONQUERED TERRITORY

When an army moves against an enemy they first drive them out and conquer their territory. Then they occupy the newly conquered territory so it stays under their control. The same must be done in our spiritual warfare. We have talked previously about driving out the enemy and regaining territory we have lost. We do that through spiritual warfare prayer and using God's Word. We close the door and then empty the room. Then we must occupy and fill the new territory so it doesn't fall back into enemy hands. If we don't fill ourselves after deliverance, Jesus says the end result will be 8 times as many demons as there were to begin with (Matthew 12:43-46; Luke 12:24-26).

We fill ourselves with God's presence. This means a personal relationship with Jesus – salvation. But it doesn't stop there. We must be committed to following Him as disciples, living for Him and serving Him in all we do. As we let His Holy Spirit direct and control our lives we are filled with His presence and do not leave any openings for demons to return. For husbands this results in showing unconditional, sacrificial love to their wives. A man can't do that unless he is submitted to Jesus and accepting His unconditional, sacrificial love for him. Only as we experience this from Jesus can we show it to our wives. For a wife it means totally trusting Jesus and yielding to Him so she can fully trust and yield to her husband. Together it means understanding and implementing the principles of a godly marriage as contained in God's Word.

As you work against what the enemy is doing in your marriage (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9), you must replace it with Jesus' presence in every area of your life and God's truth about what marriage is to be. (You can find many articles about this on the Marriage and Family portion of the CTO web site (<https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/>)).

Never underestimate the enemy and his tactics. God has brought you together but Satan wants to pull you apart (1 Peter 5:8). Use all the tools in your marriage tool belt to get victory, and that includes spiritual warfare. It also means using the tools of open communication, conflict resolution, serving each other, praying together and forgiveness (more in the next blog about this). Focus on changing yourself. There is no one else you can change! Ask God to show you where YOU need to grow and be open to what He shows you. Don't focus on your mate's issues. Get rid of the plank in your own eye before going after the speck in his or hers (Matthew 7:3-5).

Matthew 12:43-46; Luke 12:24-26 "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

Are you totally yielded to Jesus and doing all you can to live for Him alone? If not, you are leaving room for the enemy to work. Allowing sin or disobedience in your life leaves an opening for demons to fill. We don't follow Jesus out of fear of demons working against us, but it is a sobering reality to keep in mind.

FORGIVENESS AND DEMONIZING

Jesus had some very strong, sober words to say about those who do not forgive others (Matthew 18:32-35). He commands us to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22). There are many reasons for this. One is that unforgiveness is one of the most direct ways of opening one's self to demons (Ephesians 4:26; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11). This is especially true in marriage.

Forgiveness is not easy to do. Often we think it means saying that what was done to us is OK, or that we aren't going to think about it anymore. We may feel like we are letting them off the hook for what they have done. They don't deserve forgiveness. No one deserves forgiveness from Jesus, yet He gives it freely. Understanding what forgiveness means is important for us to be free.

Anger is a secondary emotion, used to cover pain. When we hit our thumb with a hammer we feel pain but we react in anger because that's an easier emotion to express. In order to forgive, though, we must admit and confront the pain we feel when others wound us. Our pride wants revenge, to hurt them back – but then we are trapped in unforgiveness and bitterness. Forgiveness is a mental choice, not an emotional feeling.

Forgiving means giving up your right to hurt the other person back because they hurt you. Forgiveness has a price – you give up your right to revenge, to see them hurt for hurting you. That's what Jesus does when He forgives us!

Instead of covering pain with anger, turn your hurt over to God in prayer. You need to do it over and over, each time you remember the pain. If not it will turn into anger and unforgiveness. Rely on God's power to help you handle the pain in a healthy way. Experience the hurt so you can move beyond it. Often times making a list of past hurts, from your mate or others, is the first step to forgiveness. Make sure you have forgiven those in your past: parents, those in past relationships, friends and enemies.

Forgiveness is not a quick emotional switch in your heart, it takes time to heal and move on. It is a process that must be repeated each time the painful memory comes back. Gradually the pain will lessen and be gone. When it tries to come back you cannot allow it to stay.

Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross and recall His mercy to you in so many ways. Ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love. We can forgive the unforgiveable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us.

When someone sins against you, forgive them immediately, even while they are still committing the offense. Even if they are doing it unintentionally, forgive immediately. Don't wait for them to apologize or admit their wrong. Forgive as quickly as you expect God to forgive you. If not your prayers will be hindered and evil can gain access to your life.

When this happens in marriage reach out to your mate immediately. Withholding love is a form of revenge and shows forgiveness has not been given. Forgiving means treating them as if the offense never occurred – the same as God forgives you. By forgiving others for having hurt us we can let go of the painful past and create a healthier relationship. That's important in marriage as well as in all relationships in life. Learn to forgive. Forgiveness is a very important tool we all need to learn to use and use regularly.

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

When you think of forgiving those who have hurt you, does God bring anyone to mind? If so, make sure you have forgiven them, and continue to do so each time the hurt returns. Make sure there isn't anything you haven't forgiven your mate for. If you need their forgiveness please ask them right away.

SATAN HATES CHILDREN

Not only does Satan hate marriage, he hates children as well. He wants to devour them (1 Peter 5:8). He knows they are a bright reflection of God's glory and enjoy an intimacy with God that he lost. He fears them because they have the potential to trust God and defeat him. They represent the future of the church. Jesus loves the little children, but Satan hates them!

He attacked the baby boys in Moses' day and in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. He incited the Jews to offer their children as sacrifices to Baal (Jeremiah 19:5). Today 60 million babies have been aborted in the USA. Worldwide 50 million are killed each year – 125,000 a day. When a baby or child is destroyed, a picture of Jesus Himself is destroyed for children are made in the image of Jesus (Matthew 25:40, 45).

If Satan can't kill children, he will do all he can to bring anxiety, frustration and fear into the home. Through an unhealthy home life, children grow up wounded and often rebellious. When a marriage is weakened, so are the children and thus the church and nation.

In Jesus' day demons afflicted children with physical illness (Matthew 17:15; Mark 9:18, 25). They prevent children from being able to control their own emotions (Mark 9:17, 22). They physically tried to harm children (Mark 9:20-22, 26-27). Satan instills hatred between siblings: Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, etc.

Dedicate your children to God – publically and in your own hearts. Ask Him to be their guide and protector. Teach them about spiritual warfare. Show them how to live for Jesus, by your own life and actions as well as your words. Help them learn to see and overcome their weaknesses as well

as develop their strengths. Assure them they are not alone. Share your own battles with them. Encourage them to have godly friends and love Jesus. Satan hates children, but God loves them and has a wonderful plan for them, and for you as well!

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Pray for the protection of the children in your family and church. Pray one by one, by name, for each child you know. Be sensitive to the ones God puts on your heart for more regular prayer. Write their names down and pray for them. If God points them out it is for a good reason!

DEMONIC ACCESS TO CHILDREN

While children are considered innocent by God until they are old enough to be accountable for their sin, Satan offers no period of grace. He attacks as soon as possible, even while still in the womb. Here are some of the reasons children are open to demonizing.

1. ANCESTRAL SIN OPENINGS, especially if the child is a male, firstborn, or named after someone who is demonized.

2. ILLEGITIMACY means a child is not conceived or born under a marriage covenant between a committed, loving man and woman. The parents are out of God's will because of sex outside marriage. Any negative thoughts or feelings they have about the unwanted pregnancy become a curse against the baby. Any kind of rejection of the baby opens the baby up to demons stepping in to fill that void in its life.

3. REJECTION in any form of a baby or child will also open them to demons filling that void. An unwanted baby coming to a married couple can have the same result. A difficult labor, painful delivery, physical or mental defects or the baby being the 'wrong' sex all can bring feelings of rejection. Problems raising the child or problems from health issues with the child, health or work load of the parents or marriage problems can cause feelings of rejection toward the growing child.

Adopted babies can be very susceptible to this. Ancestral sins from birth parents' families pass on to them. Often these children come from unbelieving parents and/or countries where demonizing is rampant. The baby can be claimed by demons in the family line as well as demons from the country of origin. In addition, there is rejection by one or both parents when the baby is put up for adoption. Even if it is done for a good reason, the baby has no covering or protection from the birth parents and is open to demonizing.

If this is true of you, first forgive the person who rejected you. In Jesus name break any curses they made against you, even if they weren't aware they were doing it. Command any demons that have come in through rejection or ancestral openings to be gone in Jesus' name. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit and presence.

4. ABUSE opens the door to demonizing as well. Incest or physical or emotional abuse cause trauma which breaks down the person's natural defense mechanisms and leaves them open and vulnerable. Abuse also overlaps with rejection as well.

5. OTHER TRAUMA can also break down normal reasoning and open the child to demonizing. Extremely fearful situations, being lost, car or other of accidents, scary TV show/movie or viewing physical abuse or violence can all cause this.

6. WORLDLY INFLUENCES GROWING UP such as games, toys, cartoons, TV programs, movies or comics that have occult or demonic activity can be an open door. Such things as Harry Potter open the door to an acceptance of anti-god supernaturalism. School activities, meditation, Ouija Boards, even yoga may open a door in a child's life. Such things as occult or cult interest, alcohol, drugs, pornography and sexual experimentation also invite demonic influence.

7. **REBELLION** against authority, parents or school, is a sign of bitterness and unforgiveness. God says rebellion is similar to occult involvement (1 Samuel 15:23).

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but Satan hates you and has a terrible plan for your life – and it starts even before birth. David sinned with Bathsheba and greatly affected himself, his family and the whole Jewish nation. Satan had started sowing the seeds for that sin in David's life when he was very young. He learned to lie and deceive to cover up sin. He then developed a desire for multiple women. Satan tries to get a foothold in our lives as soon as he can today as well. Don't let him!

Psalm 127:3-5 Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

If any of these are true of your past stop now and pray about it as I described above. If this is true of others you know who are still children, or are now adults, intercede for them in the same way.

DELIVERING CHILDREN FROM DEMONIZING

Some parents see their children as a burden, a bother and imposition. That leads to rejection. Other parents live for their children and focus everything around them. They use their children to meet their needs for self-worth, accomplishment and meaning in life. These parents make their children into idols. Both extremes are wrong. The truth is our children are gifts from God (Psalm 126:3) and must be seen as such. They belong to Him and are only on temporary loan to us. They are His, not ours. We are stewards entrusted with raising them. We aren't to either reject them nor idolize them, but to love them and raise them for His glory. Our greatest contribution to God's kingdom may not be what we do but someone we raise.

Raising them for Jesus means, in part, developing a warrior mindset in them. Too many children grow up indulged, spoiled and feeling entitled to whatever they want. Christian children must grow up with a biblical world view which includes understanding spiritual warfare. They must see themselves as living behind enemy lines and being pursued by an enemy who will do anything to destroy them. They must be trained to fight constant spiritual guerilla warfare. They need to know how to protect themselves from attacks, how to counter attack the enemy to have victory, and how to rescue those taken captive by Satan's forces. Satan is serious about destroying our children. He fires real bullets!

We train our children to have life skills, educational skills and whatever skill is needed for success in daily life. Too often we neglect spiritual training. Parents leave it up to the church. How can 1 or 2 hours a week counter all they are hit with the other 166 hours a week!

Teach them God's Word. Of course that means you must first know it yourself! Make sure they don't just know the facts in their head but that they are motivated to apply it to their lives. They must be challenged to believe because **THEY** believe, not because you do or because it was what they were always taught. Ask them often: "Do **YOU** believe this for yourself, not just because you've been taught it?" "If you really believe this is true, what changes will this make in your life?"

Memorized Scripture is one of our best weapons in spiritual warfare. When Jesus was tempted He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's (Matthew 4:1-11). Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 119:9,11 tells us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. Quote Scripture to overcome demonic attacks and temptations. Ask God to show you verses that will help against these things. Write them down and memorize them. Say them over and over when these thoughts attack you. That is the only way to victory, and God guarantees it will work!

Instill in your children a love for Jesus. They need to see that in you first of all. If they act like Christians because they fear God or want to impress you, it won't last. We should start raising them to be like Jesus from the moment of birth. After all, they are His and belong to Him. They are on loan to us temporarily to raise for Him.

Psalm 127:1,3 Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.

Do your children understand spiritual warfare? Can they recognize Satan's attacks against them? Do they have a good understanding of God's Word and how to use it to have victory? Do they know how to pray for themselves and others? Do they spend time alone with God each day? Can they survive in Satan-occupied territory when they leave your home?

HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

One of the main responsibilities a father, or even a mother, has is to pray for the protection of their family. No matter how old your children are, no matter their spiritual condition, pray for them. Job prayed for his children, even when they were grown and living on their own (Job 1:4-5).

Job was righteous (Job 1:8). He prayed regularly for his children's protection (Job 1:4-5). This is a man's responsibility, but mothers and grandparents can do it as well, especially when the father is not doing his job. He must also pray for his wife's protection. He should know her needs and weaknesses and cover them in prayer each morning. He needs to pray for his own protection, too, because Satan will do anything he can to spiritually defeat him so he doesn't pray (Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8).

Job prayed for a hedge of protection around his children (Job 1:10). A hedge is a wall, a large fence, something to shelter what is inside. It is like the log walls of a wooden stockade which was erected for protection in the early days of the American west.

If there is sin in our lives when we pray the hedge is broken down. Job lived a holy life (Job 1:1, 8) so his spiritual hedge around his children was solid and Satan couldn't penetrate it (Job 1:10-11). If we allow sin in our life our hedge won't be effective.

If you know the story of Job, you know that, despite Job's prayers, God allowed Satan to break down the hedge and attack and kill Job's children. So what good did it do for him to be holy and pray for a hedge? When Satan killed his children, he knew that what happened was God's perfect will for his family and not because of a failure on his part. When we pray, we always leave the results in God's hands for His will to be done. Sometimes that will is painful to us, like it was to Job. God allowed this to happen to use Job as a witness and testimony to angels and demons, as well as millions of people since (including us today). It stretched Job's faith as well so he grew. Are you willing to allow God whatever He thinks is best for His glory and your growth? Job certainly did (Job 1:21; 13:15).

If God removes the hedge for His glory, that is His right. He promises He will be with us and not give us more than we can handle with His help. But if the hedge is faulty because of sin in our life, or isn't there because we don't pray for it, then the results are on us! Facing trials from God to mature us and bring glory to Him are one thing, but to face them because of our sin and failure is something else entirely.

Every father, no matter how old his children, needs to pray for them every day. As the head of the family, fathers have a special authority to represent the children before God. Pray for problems and difficulties in their lives. Look for weak spots. Be alert to where the enemy is attacking. This is also true when you pray for your wife and yourself. Any sin must be put under the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9).

Parents, especially fathers (and even grandparents) must stand in the forefront of the battle for their families. We go before them, as an officer leads his troops into battle. We do this by prayer. Prayer is not preliminary to the battle, prayer IS the battle. The battle for your children and family is won or lost during your prayer time. Are you fighting for them as you should? Men, don't let the responsibility fall on your wife. It is your God-given duty as a father. Get out there and fight for your family!

Job 1:1,-2 4-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, ... His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Men, women, grandparents (whoever you are) spend time now praying for a hedge of protection around your children and grandchildren. Pray for each one by name. Make sure you cover each weakness and sin area in their lives as well. Do this daily, or as many times a week as possible. Prayer DOES make a difference!

DRESS FOR BATTLE (Armor of God 1)

When I was 19 years old I was drafted into the United States Army. Others said it would be great to be a soldier, a special privilege. But I found it very, very hard. I had to learn how to defend myself against those who wanted to destroy me. I had to learn how to fight an enemy army. When I was in the army I committed my life to God, to live for Him. Others said it would be great to be a Christian, a special privilege. But I found it very, very hard. I had to learn how to defend myself against another enemy who wanted to destroy me. I had to learn how to fight an unseen enemy.

I am no longer in the United States Army so I no longer fight the enemies of America. But I am still in God's Army – and I still must fight God's enemies. If you are in God's Army you will understand what I mean. You, too, face many battles as you live for Him.

We are at war (1 John 5:19). We are living in enemy-occupied territory (2 Corinthians 4:4) surrounded by those who would destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). In an army, the commander provides the equipment and the soldiers learn how to use it. God, our Commander, provides what we need to defend ourselves and to have victory (2 Corinthians 10:4) but we must learn how to use the equipment. Paul describes what these are in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Paul wrote these words in prison, chained to a Roman soldier. As he came to the end of the book of Ephesians he looked for a way to describe our battle and how to have victory. Looking at the Roman soldier with him, Paul used his equipment as a picture of what God provides for us.

Paul begins by commanding us to be strong, but not in our strength, only in God's strength (Ephesians 6:10). The same power that defeated Satan at the cross (Hebrews 2:14-15) and that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:18-23) is available to us. God's power is greater than Satan's power (1 John 4:4). Satan is more powerful than us, but not than God.

Paul describes this power as pieces of armor we are to put on and use (Ephesians 6:11). We are commanded to put it on. Its use is not optional but mandatory for soldiers of God. And we are commanded to put on ALL of it, not just some.

The reason we need it is because Satan has "schemes" to deceive and trap us (Ephesians 6:11). This word is used of a hunter trapping an animal. Paul calls our conflict a "struggle" (Ephesians 6:12). This word refers to a fight to the death. Satan will do anything he can to destroy you, your family and your church!

So what are we to do? How are to have victory against these schemes and struggles? Here's where the armor comes in. (Continued in next blog)

Ephesians 6:10-13 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. 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. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

Do you have a warrior mentality when it comes to living your Christian life? Are you alert to the attacks, traps and schemes against you? Do you know where the enemy tries to get you to sin? Are you able to defeat his efforts? Pray and ask God for wisdom and insight into your battle so you can better withstand.

THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND (Armor of God 2)

When a soldier faces his enemy, he needs to use the armor provided by his commander to be victorious. The same is true in our Christian life. The first piece of equipment we are commanded to wear is the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17).

The Roman soldier chained to Paul in prison wore a helmet made out of metal. Enemies would attack with a large, heavy sword which they would try to bring down on the Roman soldiers head. Thus the helmet had to be strong to protect their head. The same is true for us. Satan attacks our mind and thoughts first. He puts doubt, fear, confusion, lust, greed and whatever defeats us in our mind. Our spiritual battles are won or lost in our mind (thoughts) first of all. That's why we need the mind of Christ to have victory (1 Corinthians 2:16).

We must know who we are in Christ so we don't give in to discouragement, fear or anger. We must be aware of all we have so we don't turn to sin to meet needs God has already met. We are a new creation and must know what that means and how it applies (2 Corinthians 5:17). Knowing God's truth is the only way to protect our minds against Satan's lies.

God has given us over two hundred benefits that come at the moment of salvation. For one thing, He promises that past, present and future sins are gone forever (Romans 8:1). He deals with us in grace, not works.

We are in God's family by birth (John 3:3) and by adoption (Ephesians 1:5). Thus we are children of God (John 1:12). Ours is a family relationship with God, not king and servant or master and slave. God is our Father, Jesus our Elder Brother (Hebrews 2:11-13). We are family, with all its security, benefits and privileges. Those are ours now, not something we have to wait to have. Not only are we in His family, but we are also friends with God (John 15:15). Can you imagine God calling you a friend? Great privileges are ours! As such she shares His plans and blessings with us.

We must know beyond a doubt that we are unconditionally loved by God, now and forever (Romans 8:38-39). It has nothing to do with what we deserve or don't deserve, and there's no way we can lose it. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us less. He can't love us more and He won't love us less.

When we are hit with doubt about His provision we must remember He has promised to meet all our needs (Philippians 4:19). When we doubt His love we must remember we can never lose our salvation (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). When we get weary we must remember we will be in heaven with Him forever (Philippians 3:20). When we struggle with sin we must remember He gives us victory over sin (Galatians 2:20). When we struggle in our warfare with Satan's forces we must remember that He has promised victory over them (Colossians 1:13; Luke 10:18-19).

When both husband and wife are committed believers and wear the helmet of salvation they will be likeminded in their values, priorities, motives and goals in life. They know only Jesus can meet all their needs, not their mate, and turn to Him to have them met. Children, too, must understand all they have in Jesus as Christians. This is key to preventing Satan's attacks to our mind and thoughts.

Colossians 1:13 For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Who is winning the battle for your mind? Do your thoughts line up with Jesus' thoughts? Are you able to control your thoughts and make them obedient to Christ? If not, write down what you must do and ask God for His help doing it.

CRACKS IN OUR ARMOR (Armor 3)

Sin in life can provide an opening for demons to work against us (Ephesians 4:26-27; Mark 7:21-23; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-8). Even one sin that is allowed to remain can give an opening for demonizing. That's why God provides a spiritual breastplate for us to wear (Ephesians 6:14).

The Roman soldier chained to Paul wore a breastplate to protect his heart and vital organs. It wasn't always easy or comfortable to wear, but if he didn't put it on he was vulnerable. Even if he wore it but it allowed holes or weak spots in it, the enemy would attack those spots and defeat him. The same is true spiritually.

Paul says this represents our righteousness (Ephesians 6:14). It reminds us of the importance of being covered with Jesus' righteousness. We receive it with salvation when our sins are forgiven (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:23). Breaks and weak areas are covered when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

In marriage a husband and wife are to encourage and help each other to overcome sin. They are to set a good example for each other. Too many times one will do or say that which leads the other to sin, like Eve did to Adam. When each one lives like Jesus, serving and forgiving each other, the couple together wears the breastplate of righteousness. It is of the utmost importance for each mate to overcome sin in their lives and to help their mate do the same. When they have children they are included in this as well so the whole family is an example of holiness.

While the breastplate protects all from above the waist, the belt of truth (Ephesians 6:14) covers the waist and below. The belt helped the soldier keep his garments and weapons secured so he didn't stumble. God's truth keeps us from stumbling and falling spiritually. Satan wants to trip us up with his lies and deception. Whenever we get a thought that doesn't line up with God's truth in the Bible we must reject it. That means we must know God's Word well.

In marriage, too, we must guard against the lies the world and the flesh give us about marriage. Self-centered values, unbiblical expectations, unforgiving attitudes and me-first selfishness abound in the world and it's easy for Christians to be influenced by them as well. Children, too, must know God's truth or they, also, will fall for the lies the enemy and their flesh tell them. We must know God's truth, for only it sets us free (John 8:32).

John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

1 Peter 1:16 It is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Is there a sin in your life that has control over you? Get counseling, ask others to pray and do everything possible to have victory over it.

Make sure you know and live in God's truth. Lies like, "You'll never have victory over that sin" abound. What lies do you struggle with? What gives you victory over them?

PEACE + FAITH = VICTORY (Armor of God = 4)

Peace. Everyone talks about it but few have it. The world abounds with substitutes or that which seeks to mask the pain of emptiness. Yet God's peace is necessary to have victory in our lives. Paul, looking at the Roman soldier with him, says we need peace like the soldier needs solid, dependable footwear (Ephesians 6:15). The enemy would pick a place to attack that was advantageous to them and difficult for the Romans. Water, loose sand, sharp rocks or uneven terrain all gave the enemy an advantage. Therefore the Romans needed sturdy, strong footwear to keep their footing. If they slipped or stumbled they were defeated.

Satan attacks us when and where he thinks he has the best opportunity of winning. We need to be at peace with God so we are secure in Him and can stand no matter what happens in life. God never said He would remove our conflicts but that He would help us through them (John 17:15). He doesn't promise us absence of difficulties, but He does promise peace despite them (Philippians 4:6-7; Isaiah 26:3; John 14:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

If a husband or wife do not have God's peace but instead have turmoil, anxiety, stress or confusion that will negatively affect their marriage. Each needs to have peace with God first, then based on that they can be at peace with each other. This will give them a firm footing no matter what the enemy throws at them. Without God's peace in your heart and relationship your marriage will be characterized by conflict. That not only harms you but your children, and their impression of marriage. Children, too, need the peace of Jesus so they can mature to be like Him and fight their own spiritual battles.

The next piece of armor listed by Paul is the shield of faith. So far all the armor was part of the soldier's inner defense. The shield is the outer wall of defense (Ephesians 6:16). Roman soldiers carried large shields which they held in front of them for protection from the burning tar the enemy would fling at them (Ephesians 6:16). Without a shield they would have to dodge the fiery missiles and not be able to do any other fighting. Paul said this shield did for the soldier what our faith does for us.

Faith in God's love and sovereignty is our outer wall of defense. If we truly believe that no matter what happens God is in control and only allows what is for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28), then we won't be defeated by life's problems and pains. The greater our faith is, the stronger our protection is. It's like having a large shield compared to a very small one.

Marriage, too, must be built on faith – in God and each other. Love must be unconditional, commitment must be unshakable and forgiveness must be continual. When hard times hit a marriage, faith in God keeps both partners focused on God and not the problem or each other's failings. Don't battle your mate. Trust God and together battle your common enemy. Have faith that God knows and does what is best for you, and that your mate is His perfect choice for you for the rest of your life.

Teach your children to walk by faith and obedience. Start by teaching them to trust and obey you when young. Show you are worthy of trust. Help them transfer this to God as they get older. They must have a faith of their own. They can't hide behind your shield but must 'own' their faith and develop their individual faith in God. Start building their faith right now.

John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

On a scale of 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong) where would you rate your peace? What takes away your peace quicker than anything else? What should you do about it?

On a scale of 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong) where would you rate your faith? Where/when is your faith the strongest? Where/when is it the weakest? What should you do to increase your faith?

GOING ON THE OFFENSE (Armor of God – 5)

All the pieces of equipment we've seen in Ephesians 6 so far have been defensive. We can protect ourselves but we can't have victory. We need an offensive weapon to go on the attack and defeat our enemy. That is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). With their short, double-edged sword the Romans conquered the known world. There was no protection for their back so they couldn't turn and run, they had to move ahead against their enemies, and that is what we must do as well.

This sword of the Spirit refers to the Word of God – it is so important we get this right that Paul says so (Ephesians 6:17). Jesus quoted the Bible when tempted (Matthew 4:1-11). Read Scripture. Memorize Scripture. Quote Scripture. Pray Scripture. Think Scripture. It is the only way we can drive away temptation, lies and attacks of the enemy.

To have a healthy, growing, godly marriage, a husband and wife need to know God's Word. They need to study it individually and together. They must know how to apply it when in spiritual warfare. They must be comfortable praying Bible verses. They must teach their children the Bible as well. Too many children of Christian parents turn from the faith when they leave home because it never became part of them. They need to know God's Word, memorize portions of it, and believe it for themselves. If our children follow Jesus they WILL be attacked, so they must now know how to use their only offensive weapon, God's Word.

Paul is done listing the armor, but not done telling us how to have victory. He next mentions prayer (Ephesians 6:18-20). We can equate prayer to communication between the commander and his soldiers. Without good communication, the soldier will not know where to go or what to do. He will be left on his own. We need time talking to God and listening to Him to know His plan for us.

Praying together is very important for Christian couples. Deep, open, heartfelt prayer will bring a couple closer and help them have victory. A prayerless marriage is a powerless marriage. If your marriage is only as strong as your prayer life as a couple, how strong would it be? Maybe that's why it is so open to attack! Children, too, need to develop their own prayer life with God. They need to learn to talk to Him as well as recognize His voice when He talks to them. Communication by prayer is essential to victory.

Jesus has given us His authority to pray in His name and to command demons to be gone in His name (Matthew 28:18-19; Luke 9:1; 10:18-19). He also gives us His power to have victory in our spiritual warfare (Acts 1:8). We have power from His divine nature in us (2 Peter 1:4). We have power to live the abundant life He gives us (John 10:10). Through His Word and prayer we have all we need to have victory. What great blessings we have!

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living 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.

How well do you know the Bible? How skilled are you at using this weapon to attain victory when attacked? How strong is your prayer life? What do you need to do to have better communication with God? Spend some time now reading your Bible and praying.

WARFARE PROMISES (Armor of God – 6)

Listed below are promises related to spiritual warfare. God's promises are true (Joshua 21:45; 23:14). He keeps them no matter what. They are only good for this life; we won't need them in heaven. Carefully look over the ones listed below and mark the ones that you need right now.

Our Adversaries Will Be Defeated: Deuteronomy 32:43; Philippians 1:28; Deuteronomy 33:27

Victory is Promised: 1 Corinthians 15:57; I Chronicles 29:11; Proverbs 21:31; 1 John 5:4, 18; Rev. 12:11; 15:2; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33

God Promises To Fight For Us: 1 Samuel 14:47; Jeremiah 1:8

No Weapon Formed Against The Believer Can Prosper: Isaiah 54:17

Jesus Is Constantly Praying & Interceding On Our Behalf: 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25

God Is Always With Us: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 18:20; John 14:16, 21; Revelations 3:20

Confession Means Cleansing & Forgiveness: 1 John 1:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:5; Luke 11:13; 2 Timothy 2:21; Jude 1; Romans 8:33-39; Titus 3:4-5

God Hears & Answers Prayer: Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Jeremiah 33:3

We will never Be Separated From God: Romans 8:35-39; John 10:27-29; 3:36; 5:24

God Will Meet All Your Needs: Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32; 1 Samuel 12:24

There Is No Need To Worry: Matthew 6:25,34; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 37:1-9; Jude 24

God Promises His Care & Protection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 23:24; 32:7

Everything Will Work Out Right In the End: Romans 8:28

You Won't Ever Face Anything You Can't Handle With God's Help: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Peace Is Available No Matter What: John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; II Timothy 1:7

Trials Are Allowed To Bring Spiritual Growth: Psalm 119:67,71,75; 94:12; Isaiah 48:10; Rom. 5:3

The Believer Has Nothing To Fear: Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 2 Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

We Are Assured Of Eventual Triumph Over Our Adversaries: Acts 2:39

Victory Is Guaranteed Us: 1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:37; 1 Chronicles 29:11; 1 John 5:4, 18; 1 Chronicles 32:8; Revelation 3:5; 21:7

God Will Help Us Carry Our Burdens: Nehemiah 4:10; Matthew 11:30; Psalm 55:22

God Promises Comfort: Psalm 23:4; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 5:4; 11:28-30; John 14:16, 18; John 14:16, 18; Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

God Will Give Us Courage: Proverbs 38:1; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:7

Guidance Is Promised: Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 30:21; 58:11; Luke 1:79; John 15:13

God Will Help In Your Sorrow: Proverbs 10:22; Isaiah 53:4; John 16:22; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Revelation 21:4

Wisdom Is Promised Those Who Ask: James 1:5; 3:15-17; Luke 16:8; 21:15; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 3:19

Rejecting Wrong Thoughts: 2 Corinthians 10:5; Psalm 139:23-24; 141:3-4; Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:18-21

Power of the Word of God: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11; 59:21; Psalm 119:81, 105, 111-112; Proverbs 30:5; Lamentations 2:17; 3:37; Matt 24:35; John 5:24; 8:51; 15:7; Romans 10:17

God's Promise of Angelic Intervention: 2 Kings 6:17; Psalm 34:6-7; 91:11; Daniel 6:22; 10:5-14; Acts 12:15

Joshua 21:45 Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

Look up the promises you need from the list above. Write them on a piece of paper, word for word, and keep it with you. Read it many times during the day until you commit it to memory. Then you will have His Word in your heart for any time you need it – and you WILL need it!