

PRISCILLA SHIRER

The *Armor of God*



LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

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ISBN 9781430040279

Item 005727075

Dewey decimal classification: 248.843

Subject headings: WOMEN/SPIRITUAL LIFE/SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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Cover art Alexis Ward, The Visual Republic

Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0152

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PRISCILLA SHIRER is a wife and mom first, but put a Bible in her hand and a message in her heart, and you'll see why thousands of women meet God in powerful, personal ways through her conferences, books, and Bible studies. Those include New York Times best seller *The Resolution for Women*, as well as many other favorites (*Jonah*, *Gideon*, *Breathe*, *God Is Able*, *Discerning the Voice of God*, to name but a few).

Priscilla's gift for boldly proclaiming the uncompromising truths of Scripture while ushering people into a daily, intimate, destiny-driven experience with Christ takes her around the world, sharing the Word in person with tens of thousands each year. Through Going Beyond Ministries, she and her husband Jerry count it as their privilege to minister to people from all cultures and denominations. Together, the couple is raising three active boys.

Priscilla enjoys writing, teaching and trying to satisfy the appetites of the Shirer men. But really, underneath it all, she's just a girl ... with a Sword.

INTRODUCTION

Just so you know what you're getting into ...

This study should be unique. A bit different from others you've done. Because, by the time you've finished reading (and working) through it, the front cover shouldn't be able to close neatly back over on itself. It should be noticeably disfigured from heartfelt use. War-torn. An impossible option for regifting at Christmas time.

Pages should be ripped out (literally) and written on. The edges tattered and the corners curled. I want your kids afraid to touch it without using plastic gloves. Perhaps even the salad tongs. Unmistakable signs that you've been here, and been involved here, invested here.

Think of this workbook as industrial-grade survival gear. Duct tape and super glue. Leather straps lashed around it. Old shoelaces maybe. In tight double knots. Whatever it takes to keep it all together.

Because this is war. The fight of your life. A very real enemy has been strategizing and scheming against you, assaulting you, coming after your emotions, your mind, your man, your child, your future. In fact, he's doing it right this second. Right where you're sitting. Right where you are.

But I say his reign of terror stops here. Stops now. He might keep coming, but he won't have victory anymore. Because, starting today, we will be armed and dangerous. Prepared to stand firm against his insidious schemes.

And, as we learn about what to wear to ensure victory, we're simultaneously going to engage in what to do to guarantee it. Each week, we'll employ the secret weapon that has been divinely authorized by God Himself to stop the devil in his tracks.

We are going to pray.

Not just talk about it. No, we are going to do it.

As we gird ourselves in the armor of God, we are going to close each week by giving you an opportunity to develop a prayer strategy to promptly put the enemy in his place. Strategy? Yes.

Targeted. Specific. Precise. Detailed.

So that the enemy will know beyond any reasonable doubt that his number is up and his game is done.

Whatever you do, please do not ignore this portion of your study. It's not an addendum—a cutesy exercise to bide the time. No, it's the essential key to victory. At the back of this book, you'll find some Prayer Strategy Guidelines (page 192) and some perforated pages purposefully designed for you to craft your prayers. Pull them out of this book, and then post them in a place where you'll see them often and pray them with passion regularly. Out loud. Where the devil can hear you clearly and know that you aren't messing around.

I invite you to fully engage in every minute of this study. Don't allow the enemy one more day of victory in your life. His reign of terror stops today.

And it stops with me and you—women equipped with the armor of God.

Victoriously,





EPH. 6:10-19

- 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.
- 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.
- 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
- 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.
- 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
- 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
- 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
- 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
- 19 and pray...

WEEK 1

SIZING UP THE ENEMY

An invisible battle is taking place where you and I get the privilege of swaying the balance toward _____ in the name of Jesus Christ.

According to Ephesians 6:12, what does it mean to put on the full armor of God?

1. The battle is _____.

2. The enemy is _____.

- Satan is not God's _____ or counterpart.
 - a. Only our God is _____.
 - b. Only our God is _____.
 - c. Only our God can _____.
 - d. Only our God is _____.
- Because we have a _____ with Jesus Christ, we are seated with Him in heavenly places.

DAY 1

WRESTLING MATCH

I first began writing Bible studies more than ten years ago. At the time, my sons were very young. Jackson, my oldest, was two; Jerry Jr., my second, was three months old; and our youngest, Jude—that boy wasn't even a thought in our minds yet.

Since then, however, my babies have turned gargantuan, some of them sprouting shadowy signs of facial hair, definitely some muscle tone. And as they've begun to realize their strength, wrestling has become not only one of their favorite sports to watch, but also to undertake. With each other and, sadly, with me.

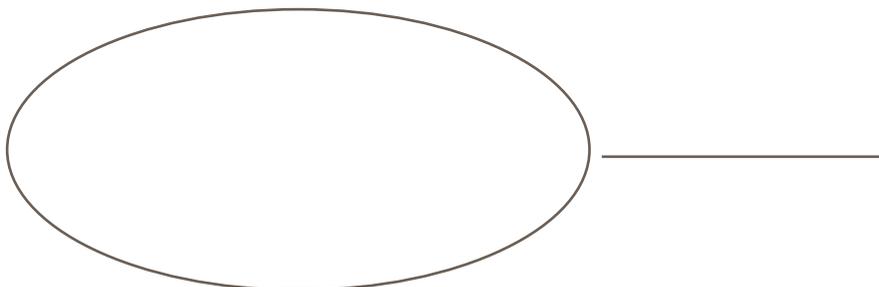
Sometimes one of them will spring from around a corner, nestle a shoulder into my waistline, and sling me, flailing and begging, over his shoulder. His brothers will laugh hysterically while I'm hauled to the sofa, tossed onto the cushions, and then forcibly pinned down, no hope of escape. Glad it's funny ... to them.

There's nothing like writing out Scripture to imprint it on your heart and encourage you to implement it in your actions. We'll be doing it a lot throughout our study. So turn to Ephesians 6:12, in your Bible or on page 7 of your workbook, and write it in the space provided below.

Reading back over it, circle what the Bible says you are *not* wrestling against, then underline the four entities that you *are* wrestling against.

No matter which translation you copied, one word is similar in most: *wrestle*. Some translate it *struggle*. The original wording that the apostle Paul used here—*palē* (pronounced PAL-ay)—denotes a contest or fight between opponents, waged in close, hand-to-hand combat with the goal of pinning down and defeating one's rival.

In the circle below, write the name of the most difficult person, most pressing problem, and/or most overwhelming circumstance you're facing in your life right now. Mention several if you'd like. Take your time. You'll be referring back to this list several times throughout your study.



In what ways are you currently “wrestling” with this person or circumstance?

Whatever you've written above, whether a person or circumstance—whoever or whatever it is—it is not your real problem. Hear that again: *IT is NOT your REAL problem.* The most troubling things in your life—things you perceive with your five physical senses—are not your real issue. Though you may be wrestling with them verbally, emotionally, financially, even physically, you are wasting precious time and energy that needs to be reserved for the real culprit—the one who is behind the scenes, striving to direct the details of some of your most acute difficulties. Everything that occurs in the visible, physical world is directly connected to the wrestling match being waged in the invisible, spiritual world.

Underline the last sentence of the previous paragraph. Then rewrite it below in your own words.

Go back to the oval and write “Not the Real Enemy” on the blank beside it.

Your real enemy—the devil—wants you to ignore the spiritual reality behind the physical one. Because as long as you're focused on what you can see with your physical eyes, he can continue to run rampant underneath the surface. The more you disregard him, the more damage he is free to do. The enemy may be invisible, but he is not fictional. He is very real, and very persistent, waging war against us constantly.

The enemy may be invisible but he is not fictional.
#ArmorOfGodStudy

The effects of the war going on in the unseen world reveal themselves in our strained, damaged relationships, emotional instability, mental fatigue, physical exhaustion. Many of us feel “pinned down” by anger, unforgiveness, pride, comparisons, insecurity, discord, fear ... the list goes on and on. But the overarching, primary nemesis behind all these outcomes is the devil himself.

Write down some of the specific ways you’ve felt “pinned down” in your life recently. (Use the space in the margin if you need more room.)

relationships

mental

emotional

physical

other

At some point during my wrestling matches with the boys, when I’ve been thoroughly subdued despite my best efforts at fighting back, their father will appear, ready to save and rescue me. The sight of his looming, six-foot-three-inch frame will send all the younger Shirer men careening in a million different directions. All of a sudden, I’m free and back on my feet. Not because I’m particularly strong—in fact, I’m not as strong as my boys are becoming—but because I’m in relationship with someone who is.

Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might (Eph. 6:10).

Being a believer doesn’t give you immunity from the assaults of the enemy, but it does give you access to the power of the Father—His power to defend you as well as reverse what’s been done to you. If you want to win the fight—if you want to join me in flipping the script, pinning down the enemy, and crippling his impact in your life—the key is realizing you’re connected to more spiritual brawn than is coming against you.

EYE OPENING

Many scholars agree that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is the gem of his New Testament writings. He wrote it not only to draw attention to the spiritual battle that exists in the invisible, unseen realm, but largely for the purpose of unveiling the strength inherent in every person who is in relationship with God through Christ. For our purposes, we’re going

to be focusing primarily on the last part of the book. But we'll look at the first half, too, because it helps unlock our comprehension of the dynamic spiritual blessings available to us that enable us to accurately apply the commands Paul spells out in the back half.

Throughout our study, we are going to keep returning to one of the most important yet overlooked aspects of our spiritual armor: prayer. Paul deemed it so critical to his explanation of how to gain victory over Satan's power in our lives that, as one scholar observed, "Ephesians has proportionately more than 55% as many verses directly related to prayer" as Romans, Paul's longest letter.¹ He even burst right out praying several times while he was writing, as we'll see. And when he prays ... man, is he strategic, being sure to tell his readers exactly what he is praying for. He knew prayer was able to change the trajectory of their whole lives. Victory in spiritual warfare is inseparable from prayer.

Read Ephesians 1:18-21 and 3:14-19, and record as many details as you can pick up about the intention of Paul's prayers.

Please notice: Paul wasn't asking in prayer that the Ephesian believers would receive their abundant inheritance of spiritual riches, blessings, power, and authority, but that they would realize it was theirs. As Christians, they already possessed these things, just as we do. But until they realized it, what good could it accomplish? What benefit would all of God's gifts be to them if they weren't aware they'd been given everything needed to send the enemy running for cover?

In reality, the spiritual armor in Ephesians 6 is merely a repeat—a different way of describing—what Paul had already been explaining to them in the first portion of the letter. How could they "put on" or "take up" things they didn't know they had? The first step for them—the first step for us—in utilizing the spiritual resources we've been given is to have our spiritual eyes opened so that we can see them.

VISION

The story of Elisha and his vision-impaired servant in 2 Kings 6 is one of my absolute favorite stories in the Bible. The setting is a battle about to ensue between the enraged king of Aram and the nation of Israel. Let's look at it together.

The first step in utilizing my spiritual resources is to recognize them.
#ArmorOfGodStudy

Open your Bible to 2 Kings 6:15-17 and answer the following questions:

1. What did Elisha's servant see when he woke up (v. 15)?
2. Given his next action (vv. 15b-16a), how would you describe the servant's emotional state at that moment?
3. What was Elisha's reaction (v. 16)?
4. How is Elisha's prayer for his servant (v. 17) similar to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (Eph. 1:18)?

Elisha's servant got an eyeful. At first, the only thing he could see was the enemy, which likely left him no other response than fear and anxiety. But then he immediately became tuned in to a game-changing spiritual reality: more was at his disposal and working on his behalf than he could have ever imagined. What his physical eyes could see were no match for what they couldn't see. Elisha's prayer helped make him aware of all the resources and strength on his side fighting against the enemy.

To be confident and victorious, you've got to be able to "see" it.

Take inventory of some of the riches given to you in Christ with which you can pin down the enemy. Write key words from each verse below. When you've completed the list, read it out loud.

- Ephesians 1:3

- Ephesians 1:7-8

- Ephesians 1:13

- Ephesians 1:18-19

These are only the gifts Paul accentuates in just one chapter. There are many, many more, and each one connects specifically with your spiritual

armor and weapons. But the first key to understanding how they all fit into your ability to pin down the enemy is vision. You cannot use them if you're not able to fully recognize them, if you're not aware of their availability to you and their importance in successfully waging war against the enemy of this world and your soul.

Victory starts here. It starts today. It starts with this. A prayer for vision. So join Paul in asking the Lord to open your eyes more fully throughout these next six weeks so you can not only detect the enemy's activity, but can also be fully aware of what God has given you to disarm and defeat him in your life.

ACTIONABLE INTEL ...

Actionable Intel is often used in a military context to describe the information decoded and gathered about an opponent that can be used to secure victory against them in future battles. At the end of each Bible study lesson, I've provided you with an Actionable Intel section to store your most important insights. Use it as a place to collect pieces of spiritual information and debrief from what God has revealed to you. Remember: the intel that God's Spirit is giving you is not just a list of things to know. It's a divine strategy being given by God to take into the fight. The enemy has been gathering intel to develop a strategy against you. This is your chance to gather information to craft a strategy for victory against him. At the end of each week, you'll use all the intel you've gathered to craft a personalized prayer strategy against the enemy.

DAY 2

UNDISGUISED

The first-century Ephesian culture was well acquainted with the spiritual realm. Most everyone who lived in the Mediterranean world during this time period believed evil spirits existed. They didn't spend time trying to determine whether or not a spirit world was real but rather how to manage and hinder the beings who lived in it. (Check out Paul's experiences at Ephesus in Acts 19:11-41).

So when Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian church, he would not have had to convince them of their need for a countermeasure against demonic influence. They knew they needed it desperately and usually looked to magic to assist. The effects of demonic activity were ubiquitous, pervasive, everywhere.²

Today, as we live out our beliefs about the spiritual realm, particularly in relation to our beliefs about Satan, we tend to make one of two mistakes:

1. We overestimate his impact in our lives, living with an inflated, erroneous perspective of his actual influence and abilities. As a result, we are laden with undue fear and anxiety.
2. We underestimate him and miscalculate the impact of his influence in our lives. We prioritize what we can see over what we can't.

Which of the above extremes do you find most prevalent within your sphere of influence?

Based on the perspective you chose, how does it specifically impact the way people live? What are some of its more noticeable effects?

What about you? What's your tendency? Do you personally overestimate or underestimate the enemy's influence in the circumstances of your life? What effect does this inclination have in your life? Prepare to discuss with your group.

As we discussed in day 1, we tend to concentrate primarily on what's visible and physical, instead of zeroing in on the invisible and spiritual. Or, if we are aware of the enemy's work, we aren't quite sure how to engage him and defeat him.

The enemy's approach is cryptic. He keeps his activity so cleverly hidden that we almost forget his existence or, at best, only recognize his presence in a theoretical, nonthreatening way. We are far less quick to discern his schemes, pinpoint his efforts, and proactively combat them the way other cultures (albeit incorrectly at times) may have done. We've become a culture relatively unaware of the enemy's presence, unaware of his conspiracies to destroy our lives, unaware that he's distracting us from reaching our destinies.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14 in the margin. How have you found this tactic of the enemy to be true in your own life?

And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14, HCSB).

Spiritual victory is directly connected to your ability to "undisguise" the enemy. To uncover him. Unveil him. Unmask him. That's half the battle. But it's the half your enemy doesn't want you to pay much attention to, because once you do, you automatically begin to threaten his tyranny in your life.

The names of the enemy reveal his character, intention and activity. See Digging Deeper I on page 21 for more insight.

Yesterday, we talked about the importance of having vision, of realizing the riches made available to us through Christ. One of the most critical roles our vision plays is helping us detect the enemy lurking behind the surface of some of life's most pressing difficulties. Let's spend more time on that today.

From Ephesians 6:12, write down the four entities with which you are truly engaged in battle.

These evil, supernatural forces are the same principalities and authorities Paul mentioned earlier (Eph. 1:21; 3:10). They operate under the enemy's control and carry out his wicked purposes and schemes. The Bible doesn't give us a prodigious amount of details about the organizational structure of the devil's dark forces, but "this list of spiritual powers has connotations of hierarchy and organization. Just as there are generals, privates, and a lot of ranks between them in our military structures, demonic powers also seem to be arranged according to role and power."³

What we do know for certain about these entities, however, are 1) how the Bible describes their actions and 2) the place they are located.

THIS PRESENT DARKNESS

According to Scripture (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:10, for example) what is the enemy's most obvious calling card?

The express purpose of Paul's command—"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10)—is so that we can "stand against the tactics of the Devil" (v. 11). *Tactics* refers to deceptive strategies. Schemes. Dirty tricks. His attacks are always wrapped in the packaging of deception, always designed to manipulate the truth about God and about you.

What he wants is to lead you into sin so that fellowship is broken between you and God—between you and the One who provides your true power and strength. Then, weakened and vulnerable, you'll be susceptible to his plans to destroy you. That's why he seeks to stay hidden as much as possible.

So don't believe for one second that the false ideologies of the culture (obsession with appearance, perceptions of worth, the redefinition of the family, all of it) have been developed by chance. The evil temptations that appeal to your specific desires are not accidental. The discord and disharmony that threaten your most valuable relationships are not coincidental. The temptations that tug at you during your weakest moments are not uncalculated. None of these things are happenstance. They are his deceptive tactics (and that of his evil entourage), specifically designed and personalized to keep you from experiencing abundant life.

Look back at day 1's lesson at the people or circumstances you listed in the oval as being among the most difficult in your life. Prayerfully consider how the enemy's calculated deception may be playing a role in this entire situation or situations. Record your thoughts below.

HOME COURT ADVANTAGE

All right, so we know this much: Satan's calling card is deception. But Paul also goes to great lengths to draw attention to the place where the enemy and his evil forces are located. Not once but twice, he echoes this important fact in the Book of Ephesians.

According to these verses (Eph. 3:10 and 6:12), where are the enemy and his spiritual forces of darkness located?

This is the invisible, unseen realm in which the cosmic battle originates and rages, where real activity is even now taking place that directly affects our circumstances. Weapons and artillery that might be impressive and impactful in fighting an earthly battle do not work in this realm. Only those weapons divinely sanctioned and authorized by God (which are the ones we're going to learn to use in this study) can have any effect in a battle like this.

So since the enemy is in heavenly places, and the war is raging in heavenly places, and the weapons required for achieving victory are designed to be operational in heavenly places ... it's easy to feel a bit confused and unsure how you could possibly engage in this battle since you, dear mortal sister, are down here on earth, under the pile. Understandable. A little lesson here on your spiritual location is in order.

Record all the important facts you discover about heavenly places from these verses:

- Ephesians 1:3
- Ephesians 1:20
- Ephesians 2:6

Turns out, you're not such an earthling after all. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3). Not only is every spiritual blessing you will ever need for walking in victory in heavenly places, but even right now as you hold this book, you too are seated in heavenly places with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

Pause and let the worship fall over you from that statement. You are not just present in heavenly places, you are sitting down in those heavenly places!

In ancient times, being "seated" was the symbolic posture of a king whose army had already been victorious in battle. Instead of standing, pacing, worrying himself to death, he would park himself on his throne as a visible statement of his complete and utter triumph.

Christ our King is seated in heavenly places as a proclamation that ultimate victory over the enemy has already been accomplished. And you and I are seated there, too, since we've been made victorious in Christ. Your enemy knows it, and so should you. The cross and the resurrection were the final steps in sealing the claim of victory over his kingdom.

He's been:

- disarmed, embarrassed (Col. 2:15);
- overruled (Eph. 1:20-22);
- mastered (Phil. 2:9-11);
- rendered powerless (Heb. 2:14);
- and all his hard work destroyed (1 John 3:8).

Once you've placed faith in Jesus, you are now transported with Christ to a position of victory. In other words, you have the home court advantage.

So, yes, we still live on earth and like Job on the ash heap or Paul in prison we still have to deal with the physical ailments, environmental evils, and relational hardships of this planet. But because of our spiritual location, we always have hope. And, through Christ, we can bring the victory of heaven into our experience on earth.

I have the home
court advantage.
#ArmorOfGodStudy

Satan knows that he cannot destroy you. Too late for that. The best he can do (and he intends to make full use of it) is to make your time on earth futile and unproductive, to suffocate you with sin, insecurity, fear, and discouragement until you are unable to live freely and fully. He can't "unseat" you, but he can intimidate you and render you ineffective and paralyzed.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In Scripture, names were much more than nomenclature. They revealed the character of the person. The same is true for our enemy. An overview of his names reveals his overarching methodology of attack against God's people. Here are some of them.

1. *Satan* means "the adversary" [of God]. The enemy is antagonistic to the plans and purposes of God. He will always seek to misconstrue and malign the character of God and to thwart the purposes of God (Job 1:6).
2. *Devil* means "slanderous." The enemy's intention is to defame and malign the character and intentions of God and others. He will whisper lies in hopes of denigrating God's reputation, which in turn will diminish your confidence in God and cause you to mistrust His direction (Matt. 4:1; Eph. 4:25-27).
3. *Lucifer* means "day star" or "shining one." The enemy's appearance is attractive, alluring, and charming. Because of this, he can approach you in an appealing way to lure and entice your attention and admiration. This deceptive package will often be the furthest from repulsive or foul, making his handiwork difficult to detect (Isa. 14:12-14; Luke 10:18).
4. *Tempter* means "one who tempts people for the purpose of enticing them to sin." The enemy seeks to mislead your passions so that you will seek to fulfill them in perverted, illegitimate ways. He'll intentionally set personalized temptations in your path that are distorted variations of God's gifts to you (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5).
5. *Ruler of the World* means the enemy's approach is not isolated to individuals. He has collective cultural and global methods designed to derail entire nations and people groups from God's intended plan. He carefully crafts and proliferates philosophies, doctrines, and moral perspectives across entire demographics in order to steer whole societies away from God (John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4).
6. *Prince of the Power of the Air/Prince of Darkness* means the devil does not work alone. He is the chief leader of the tribe of dark forces who seek to carry out his purposes in the domain of darkness—a very real, yet invisible realm that effects everything seen and heard in the physical, visible realm (Eph. 2:2; Eph. 6:12).
7. *Accuser* means "one who condemns." The enemy seeks to weaken the believer's confidence and influence by conveying condemnation and guilt. He points out and constantly reminds you of sin and mistakes in order to cripple the believer with discouragement and shame (Rev. 12:10).
8. *Father of Lies* means "liar" and "falsifier." The enemy's character contains no truth and light. When he speaks and acts, he will always seek to falsify and deceive. He will blatantly and unapologetically misconstrue the truths of your personal reality and circumstance. He will also seek to mislead you with inaccuracies regarding God, His Word, and His plans for you (John 8:44).

If you feel anything like I do right now, you've had enough. You won't let him have one more moment of victory in your life.

Not today.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Eph. 4:14).

Not on your watch.

As we go through these next six weeks of study, we're going to become more aware than ever of the power that our position in heavenly places affords us. We are also going to learn to access it and use it. Together, we'll start to understand what it means to throw our weight around with the divine strength we've been given and push back the darkness. With every passing day, we'll grow stronger and be fortified.

ACTIONABLE INTEL ...

DAY 3

LAZY DAYS

There is an enemy. He is real. And he is intent and active, working against you day by day, moment by moment. His goal? To keep you from experiencing the results of the victory that is already yours in Christ.

He knows that you, as a daughter of God, cannot be destroyed. But he has other goals in the meantime: to distract you, discourage you, divide you from others, and disable you from experiencing everything that is rightfully yours as an adopted member of God's family. He wants to terrorize you until you're rendered incapacitated, miserable, and incapable of living in the benefits of a victory that has already been won.

I'm not making this up. Nor am I trying to scare you. In fact, you shouldn't be afraid, despite the target drawn in bright red colors on your back. But you'd better be alert and on your guard.

What do you think it looks like to be "on your guard" against the enemy in practical, everyday terms?

Christianity has become quite comfortable. Coffee shops in church lobbies. Shuttles to the sanctuary from the parking lot on rainy days. Games to entertain our children in Sunday School. Fine. Good. Enjoy.

But don't be lulled to sleep. Don't ever allow the lush settings of the culture to dull your alertness or curb the fighting edge needed to defeat your most formidable foe. Refuse to allow comfort and ease to make you apathetic, uninterested, and in some cases, unaware of the battle that is raging all around.

The lazy days of Christian culture must come to an end. Starting today. Starting with you. Starting with us.

Have you seen Christianity and the general church culture become more characterized by laziness and apathy than activity and alertness? If so, how?

In what ways, if any, have you noticed spiritual apathy or indifference in your own life recently?

Consider again the specific person or circumstances you wrote down at the beginning of the week. Which of the following two choices would best describe your approach to this issue within the last month?

- Proactive, alert, on guard for the enemy's strategies
- Spiritually disengaged, disinterested, too tired to care

Based on your selection, how would you describe the results of your approach?

Our enemy celebrates lethargic Christian living. When we're giving up on relationships, disregarding the purity of our reputations, yielding to our appetites without putting up much, if any, resistance, he can basically go unchecked. Wreak havoc in the lives of God's people. Ultimately, he can hamstring the church from achieving the purposes of God. Our indolence and inertia work to his great advantage, practically rolling out the red carpet for his entrance into the unlocked doors of our indifference and despondency. He's hardly going to pass up an opening like that.

That's why he works so hard to beat you down with discouragement. Rag you into discontentment. Lie to you about who God is, causing you to doubt the Lord's all-good intentions toward you. Hammer you with accusations that place a burden of shame and guilt on your shoulders too heavy to carry. Trick you into thinking your situation will never change, and that God doesn't hear you or care when you call out to Him. Soon your fire of passion starts to burn low. You grow lackluster. Disinterested. Low in spiritual fiber. Your spiritual armor goes unworn and unused.

Bingo.

Now you're exactly where the enemy wants you—where you no longer want to fight for peace and passion in your marriage, where you no longer believe your child can be restored, where you no longer hope for healing in your body, where you no longer see any path to freedom from your addictions, where you just don't see the purpose in praying anymore ... So you don't. You don't ask or seek or knock. You don't take advantage of your heavenly-placed position and benefits package that comes from having "every spiritual blessing" in the universe handed to you as an inheritance.

Maybe you kind of don't care anymore. You're not even sure you want to. But through prayer, you can get your "want-to" back.

TAKE ACTION

Write out Ephesians 6:10-11. You can copy it directly from page 7 if you'd like. When you are finished, underline all the action verbs and phrases.

Now, turn to page 7 and underline the verbs you see in verses 12-19.

The Book of Ephesians is a delicate mix between God's gifts and our responsibilities. The first three chapters speak to the identity and status given to believers in Christ. But beginning in the fourth chapter, the tone shifts to the responsibility of the believer to act.

First, the indicatives—everything that's been accomplished for us in Christ because of the victory He's already won. Then, the imperatives—how we are supposed to use them so that we can actually receive and experience the tangible, long-term effects of this victory in our practical, everyday living.

Believe and receive first; then utilize what you've been given.

In your own words, what is the difference between indicatives and imperatives? Between the first half of Ephesians and the second half?

Three overarching
indicatives in Ephesians:

- 1) Headship of Christ,
- 2) The cornerstone is
Christ,
- 3) Unity in Christ

An example of this balance is seen clearly in Ephesians 6:10-11. Paul's command to "be strong in the Lord" is in the passive tense, meaning that strength is something God gives you, something you receive. You could actually read this phrase, "Be strengthened in the Lord." Strength is infused into you by God Himself.

But then Paul describes how we put ourselves in position to receive this strength: "Put on the full armor of God." By putting on the armor, we activate the strengthening process. It's like plugging in your phone charger. You can count on your phone to hold a charge, but only if you've taken the initiative to plug it in. We will never realize the fullness of God's strength in our lives if we ignore the spiritual protection He offers. It's always available, but we must "plug in" if we want to access it.

Not only this, but the call to "put on" the armor denotes both urgency and resolution. It's as if Paul is saying there's no time to waste. The armor must be put on now. Daily. Consistently. Faithfully. If we want to see our resolve strengthened and our stance made firm, we need to realize that spiritual warfare doesn't take a day off. No holidays or vacations. We must choose—now!—to engage each of the individual pieces of armor if we expect to see their full effect in spiritual warfare.

What's the difference between the passive command to "be strong in the Lord" and the active command to "put on the whole armor of God"? How does one impact the other?

Work out your salvation
with fear and trembling;
for it is God who is at
work in you, both to will
and to work for His good
pleasure
(Phil. 2:12b-13).

Philippians 2:12b-13 is a great combination of active and passive commands. Read it in the margin and see if you can detect them. Write them below
Active:

Passive:

Even though the previous question was intended to help you spot both the active and passive sides of authentic gospel living, don't miss the beautiful, encouraging message of verse 13. Read it again. God is working in you right now to help you want to get your want-to back.

WAKE-UP CALL

The call to victorious Christian living is a wake-up call out of laziness, urging you to rise up and take serious action. The strength you need for resisting and standing firm depends on it. Satan and the demons of darkness are hoping you'll be disengaged and disinterested instead of alert, aware, and active.

Record the commands to action described in 1 Peter 5:8. Why do we need to respond this way? What happens when we don't?

Lazy, lethargic Christianity can no longer be an option. Not when an angry, hungry lion is out there stalking you, waiting for a moment of weakness or distraction, itching to pounce. Not if you want to experience the full bounty of life in Christ.

During these six weeks, the apostle Paul is going to call us to an active Christian lifestyle that requires a firm resolve and forward movement. In prayer. In righteousness. In faith. It demands we get serious, strategic, and intentional.

Come on now—it's time to wake up.

ACTIONABLE INTEL ...

BAIT SELECTION

My sons and I enjoy fishing. Our neighbor's pond across the street affords us ample opportunity to toss in a line and hope for a few small sun perch. I'm no serious fisherman, mind you. No live worms for me. Our bait is leftover hot dog meat from the refrigerator. It usually does the trick ... at least at the pond at our house.

But last summer we visited a Christian camp that circled a massive lake, stocked with larger varieties like bass and catfish. My boys and I, of course, couldn't pass up the chance to try for the bigger catch. But we weren't having much luck, until a man fishing near us saw my sad excuse for bait and offered to exchange it for something better.

He dislodged a tiny perch that one of my sons had just reeled in, affixed a much sturdier hook on the line, and then did something shocking: gashed that poor little fish right onto the hook. As bait!

Detecting the enemy's strategies is the first step in defeating him. See Digging Deeper II on page 33 for more insight on the primary ways he attacks women like you and me.

"Try it now," he said.

Urgh! We all were thoroughly flabbergasted and grossed out. (Actually, that was just me. My boys were thrilled by the whole bloody mess.) But sure enough, when we cast that perch into the water, my 11-year-old was soon reeling in a five-pound bass.

A change in bait changed everything.

The enemy is a master at choosing the right kind of bait to snag you. Sure, he uses some overarching, one-size-fits-all tactics to disarm God's people in general, but he doesn't use only one type of bait for every person, or even the same type of bait for any one individual over time. No, he carefully considers and calculates your current situation, taking into account your weaknesses and strengths, your interests and tendencies, your history and past abuses, everything. Then, utilizing this available information, he crafts a specific strategy to hook you and reel you in.

Don't believe it? If you look carefully, you'll notice that the battles your enemy wages against you—especially the most acute, consistent ones—possess a personality to them, an intimate knowledge of who you are and the precise pressure points where you can most easily be taken down. Random accident? Lucky guess? I don't think so. These areas of greatest fear and anxiety in your life are clues to some important spiritual information. They reveal, among other things, that a personalized strategy has been insidiously put in place to destroy your vibrancy and render you defeated. It's been drawn up on the blackboard by someone who knows from experience how best to exploit your areas of vulnerability.

Consider again some of the people or circumstances you listed in that oval at the beginning of the week. In what ways, if any, might these issues reveal how the enemy has personalized his bait to hook you? How do one or more of these people or situations press a specific "hot button" for you?

Once you become aware of the enemy's strategy and begin to see his handiwork beneath the surface of your most trying life circumstances, you can not only begin to target the right culprit, but you can also start foreseeing some of his intentions and attacks. Then you can be prepared beforehand, giving him little room to make you a casualty of war.

Listen to me: Satan is tricky, but he is not original or particularly creative. He's always had the same basic game plan. And if you're watching, you'll see that sometimes the areas where he's targeting you are the ones you'd already expect. By being proactive in prayer and girded in your spiritual armor, you'll be able to detect his secret plans before the attack unfolds and you can sabotage his efforts to deceive and disable you.

TARGET PRACTICE

I'm not saying the devil is not a formidable enemy. I'm just saying we give him far too much credit for being impossible to defend and defeat. Most of the reason why he gets the best of us so often is because we make his job way too easy for him. So let's try making it a little easier on ourselves instead. I believe we can boil down his playbook to just a couple of main attack strategies. And to decode them, all you need to do is ask yourself two questions.

1) IN WHAT WAY(S) DO I POSE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO THE ENEMY AND HIS PURPOSES?

The enemy will always seek to hinder you in areas where you are keeping his goals from being accomplished. Are you particularly vocal about your faith? Then he may agitate fear or insecurity in you so you'll keep your mouth closed. Is your marriage strong, a good model of stability for other couples? Then he will try to detour one or both of you away from each other through illegitimate entanglements. Satan will predictably want to cripple you in the area of your life where doing so will most directly defame God and hinder His church.

Again—the person or circumstance you wrote down earlier—how might the enemy interpret this area of your life as being of benefit to the kingdom of God, and therefore target it for destruction?

Here's a recent example from my own life: One of the most exciting (and shocking) things the Lord has ever allowed me to do in ministry was participate in a movie project called *War Room*. I was stunned speechless when the directors, Stephen and Alex Kendrick, called to see if I would consider acting in it. Me? An actress? I laughed out loud. Like, for real. But when I found out the message of the movie was about the power of prayer and standing firm against the enemy, I reconsidered.

Several weeks before filming started, one of them sent me this email, detailing some ways to prepare for the experience. Here's a portion of it:

“We have had spiritual attacks on all of our movies. The theme of this movie is on calling the body of Christ among the nations to their knees in strategic prayer. The devil is not happy about that. Now that you are joining the team, don't be surprised if the enemy drops unusual family, relational, or health problems in your life. Don't worry. Just prepare. God is greater than anything the enemy attempts.”

Bottom line: Anticipate the enemy to hit you in the area of your greatest influence. And, boy, were they right! The enemy came after my family with a vengeance. Disagreements. Short fuses. Hot feelings. Even having

been forewarned, I didn't fully realize how that summer of on-site shooting would affect some of our relational dynamics. Never has our family endured as difficult a stretch as during the summer of shooting this movie—which, among other things, dealt with preserving unity in one's family!

That's just the way our enemy plays. Dirty, but not without being decipherable. Consider where you're feeling the strongest these days. And expect to take some hits at those particular areas.

2) WHAT ARE MY FLESH'S TENDENCIES, INNATE PASSIONS, AND WEAKNESSES?

Every human being has proclivities—a bent toward particular tastes and interests, passions and curiosities, some good but maybe some bad. Or at least sensitive, perhaps embarrassing, things we don't like others to know about us. And those predispositions and weaknesses are the ones the enemy will seek to exploit. Whether they come from your upbringing, your inborn personality, or vulnerabilities created by events in your life, these appetites of yours inform the enemy's bait selection when targeting you. And when you combine this suite of selections with his knowledge of just the right time to tease them out, you know as much or more than he does about how he may be planning to attack you at your most susceptible moments.

One of my sons, for example, has always been prone toward fear and anxiety. Ever since he was a small child, he's leaned toward this emotional response to external stimuli. Knowing this, I've been very specific in praying for him, even when he was a tiny baby. I routinely ask the Holy Spirit to instill courage within him, to be a wall of protection against the enemy's attempts to exploit his bent in this direction. I also speak God's Word out loud over him regarding his position and power in Christ. Fear is an opening Satan will use to get at my son's heart to cripple him if we let him—if we don't know where to be watching.

What about you? If alcoholism runs in your family, you know the enemy will likely be looking to destroy you through what's perhaps a sensitivity in your mind toward addiction. If promiscuity has been a part of your history, he'll want to keep that fire burning in your body while sending enticing offers to lead you astray.

Revisit your answer from a moment ago about your inclinations, tendencies, and “hot spots.” Now that you’ve considered the insight they give you into Satan’s strategies against you, can you think of any more? May as well be honest here. The more authentic you are, the more specifically you’ll be able to zero in on the enemy’s plans.

What practical parameters can you put around your life to safeguard yourself from the enemy’s attempts to bait you in this area of your life?

Keep a close eye on your areas of greatest strength and your areas of greatest weakness. They are likely the places where you can expect the enemy to target his attacks against you. When you know where to look, you can see him coming from a mile away. He’s really not that clever. He’s just cunning

But his number’s up with you and me. Be ready. Be prayed up. Stand your guard.

ACTIONABLE INTEL ...

THE ENEMY'S STRATEGIES

After polling a large cross section of women, asking them to reveal the primary ways the enemy attacks their lives, several common categories defined their responses. Below are ten of the enemy's favorite strategies to use against God's women as they pursue abundant life in Christ.

Strategy #1—Against Your Passion

He seeks to dim your whole desire for prayer, dull your interest in spiritual things, and downplay the potency of your most strategic weapons (Eph. 6:10-20).

Strategy #2—Against Your Focus

He disguises himself and manipulates your perspective so you end up focusing on the wrong culprit, directing your weapons at the wrong enemy (2 Cor. 11:14).

Strategy #3—Against Your Identity

He magnifies your insecurities, leading you to doubt what God says about you and to disregard what He's given you (Eph. 1:17-19).

Strategy #4—Against Your Family

He wants to disintegrate your family, dividing your home, rendering it chaotic, restless, and unfruitful (Gen. 3:1-7).

Strategy #5—Against Your Confidence

He constantly reminds you of your past mistakes and bad choices, hoping to convince you that you're under God's judgment rather than under the blood (Rev. 12:10).

Strategy #6—Against Your Calling

He amplifies fear, worry, and anxiety until they're the loudest voices in your head, causing you to deem the adventure of following God too risky to attempt (Josh. 14:8).

Strategy #7—Against Your Purity

He tries to tempt you toward certain sins, convincing you that you can tolerate them without risking consequence, knowing they'll only wedge distance between you and God (Isa. 59:1-2).

Strategy #8—Against Your Rest and Contentment

He hopes to overload your life and schedule, pressuring you to constantly push beyond your limits, never feeling permission to say no (Deut. 5:15).

Strategy #9—Against Your Heart

He uses every opportunity to keep old wounds fresh in mind, knowing that anger and hurt and bitterness and unforgiveness will continue to roll the damage forward (Heb. 12:15).

Strategy #10—Against Your Relationships

He creates disruption and disunity within your circle of friends and within the shared community of the body of Christ (1 Tim. 2:8).

DAY 5

STRATEGY SESSION

So, what's your plan? Do you have one? Your enemy certainly does. He's been studying you, baiting you—zeroing in on your tendencies and habits, your proclivities and appetites. His attacks have not been random or unsystematic. They are highly calculated and precise, ready to be waged against you in heavenly places.

On this final day of our first week of study, you and I can see him much more clearly for who he really is and what he's been doing to discourage and disarm us. So now it's time to compose our own strategy, to cut him off at the pass. That's right—a plan to sabotage his efforts—because we can't just go barreling into this fight blindly. We can't just throw something up against the wall and hope it sticks. We need to craft a blueprint for our success.

A strategy for war.

LET US PRAY

Today, we've come to what will be the highlight of each of our weeks together. This is where the proverbial rubber meets the road and you begin to advance against the enemy's activity in your life. This is how you'll begin to Take. Stuff. Back.

In Jesus' name.

Listen to me carefully: Prayer is the mechanism that brings down the power of heaven into your experience. It is the divinely authorized method that activates your spiritual armor and makes it effective. Prayer alerts the enemy to your awareness of his intentions while safeguarding you from his attacks. It is his kryptonite. It is what weakens and unravels all his ploys against you.

I believe I can say it as bluntly as this: Unless prayer is a vital and thriving part of your life, you will never achieve spiritual victory. No matter how many times you go through this study, no matter how many conferences

and ministries you participate in, you will forever be spinning your wheels until you're grounded in prayer. Prayer is the connective tissue between you and heavenly places.

And that, that, is always where spiritual battles are won.

So, starting today, and at the end of every week we have together, here's what I want you to do: Compile the various bits of "Actionable Intel" you've been gathering from your week of Bible study, turn to the perforated pages in the back of your workbook and begin to craft a personalized prayer strategy for your life—one that's girded in thanksgiving and gratitude for what God has already done, and also punctuated with promises from His own Word. Then ask—yes, ask—the Lord to open your spiritual eyes, to alert you to the enemy's intentions, and to give you the proactive courage to lay down your fallback, physical weapons in exchange for weapons that may not feel as natural to you but really work! Don't speak in generic terms; put your own issues, loved ones, and needs on paper. Then use this as your reminder to pray against the enemy and every demonic assault he's planned against you.

Look at the verses from Ephesians 6 below. Underline every instance where you see any variation of the word "pray."

"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf ..." (vv. 18–19a).

Turns out, there aren't only six pieces of armor, as most people think. There are seven. Prayer is the linchpin that holds our armor together. It is what activates all the other pieces and fortifies you as a soldier in battle. It is the device that empowers and "charges up" every other piece so they can be used effectively against the enemy. Without prayer—I say it again—your armor cannot, will not, be infused with the power that only God's Spirit can give.

Prayer activates
your spiritual armor.
#ArmorOfGodStudy

When Paul says to "pray at all times," he doesn't mean time in a general sense. The word translated *at all times* in this verse is *kairos*, which refers to specific times, precise occasions, and particular events. In spiritual warfare, as we detect enemy activity and deploy the different pieces of armor, our prayers need to be fervent and specific, strategic and personal. Tied to specific needs that arise at that specific occasion. That's the kind of prayer

that energizes the armor of God for maximum effectiveness.

Your praying only needs to be authentic and heartfelt. No specific length. No need for ten-dollar words and poetic prose. You're not trying to impress anybody. Just be raw, frank, and real with God. Then—and I'm serious about this—tear your prayer out of this book and post it somewhere where you will see it every day and be reminded to pray it. That might be on your bathroom mirror or the wall of your office cubicle.

Refer to page 192 if you need prayer guidelines to help you get started.

The enemy is going to be sorry he ever messed with you, because you're a woman of fervent, precise, effective prayer who plans to shut him down, IN JESUS' NAME. He's been gathering his intel on you? Striking at places where you pose the biggest threat to his work? Hitting you where you're weak or simply unaware?

Well, now, you're gathering some intel to use against him.

So, grab a pen.

Turn to the back of your book.

Write.

And then ... pray.

PRAYER
RELEASES
ALL
YOUR
ETERNAL
RESOURCES

