

“Soul Protection”

Ephesians 5:1,2,8,9, & 6:10-18

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Ephesians 5:1, 2, 8, 9, 6:10-18 NLT

Imitate God in everything you do, because you are God’s dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. Live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Be strong in the Lord and in God’s 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. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

The Apostle Paul was writing when the Roman military industrial complex was at the peak of its power and to a people who understood the technological superiority of Roman soldiering, tools, and training. The Apostle Paul used examples of Roman defensive tools, because they were familiar the world over and such imagery carried real power. It was a time of change, unrest, opposing views, a hostile environment, so the soldiers were under constant attack from outside armies and inside protestors. Three times the Apostle Paul mentions “stand firm” for he is advocating defensive use of the armor to protect our souls, so we can live a life filled with love, shining with all that is good, right, and true.

The first principle of our training is to stay alert scanning our life, family, and world for potential threats such as lies, fear, hate, negativity, worry, irritability, sadness, gossip, anger, division, jealousy, perfectionism, anxiety, addictions, greed, exclusivity, depression, apathy, imbalance of power, justice, resources, wealth, and all that diminishes life. We see a lot of these threats in our politics and media. We are to stand firm, to protect our soul, family, and community from any of these unfruitful works of darkness. God has equipped each of us with significant protection and the Holy Spirit. We are to stand firm, identify all threats to a loving, joyful, peaceful, and harmonious life with all people and the environment. Together when we expose the threats, God’s light shining through us disperses the darkness.

We wear the belt of truth. Often the first attack of fear and hate is a lie. The lie begins by portraying a person, or group, as undesirable, undeserving or a threat, shifting our focus away from the liar. If we do not speak the truth, then our lies become a fire that burns down an entire forest. Often the lies escalate after a seed of fear is planted to calling the person, or group, a name. Name calling, labels, is never ever appropriate. Always stick to the actions. We love every person. We should only confront inappropriate actions, behavior, and thoughts. Gossip is anytime we share a story or Facebook post without checking to make sure every aspect of the story is true. Gossip is listening to someone tell lies and not speaking up with the truth. Avoid triangulation. If you have a concern with someone or some group, go directly to that person or group. The exception is abusive situations where the police need to be involved. Tell the truth of the good you see in people, even your enemies. Debate your differences respectfully, and you love the people with different views. Telling the truth builds trust and is the cohesion of community.

We wear the body armor of God’s righteousness. Some translations say the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. We are saved by the grace of God. We are made righteous by God washing away all of our mistakes, imperfections, and shortcomings, and God filling us with glory, completeness, love, joy, and peace. No one can do, or not do, be, or not be, anything that earns salvation or rejects salvation, so all people are

equal. We are saved and made righteous entirely by the free gift of God. Each of us is no better or worse than any other person. Each of us is different. Society, and we, may value certain talents over others, however each person is equally, uniquely talented, gifted, and wonderful. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. The more we are aware of God's grace to us the easier it is to be gracious to others. The body armor of righteousness assures us that God is continually transforming us, setting us free from a sin-filled life to live a righteous life. The same is true for the world. Darkness is being defeated with God's glorious light.

We wear the shoes of peace. Being peaceful with others begins with inner peace. Constantly nurturing your belief that you are God's cherished, beloved child, and that your value and worth comes from being God's child. Letting go of negative thoughts, so you are free to think good, pure, pleasing thoughts. Letting God's grace permeate you, so you are open to love and joy. Inner peace helps us be nonanxious in hostile situations, to take a breath, to realize that often someone's frustration comes from their stuff. Inner peace enables you to listen, hear the truth, and reestablish a peaceful relationship.

We wear the shield of faith. Shields are most effective in a phalanx (fala-LINKS) that is a group holding up shields to protect from every angle. We gather as a family of faith to support, encourage, and love each other. We watch out for each other, help, and protect those who are struggling. We rejoice with those who are rejoicing and grieve with those who are grieving. We worship, learn, and serve together.

We take a specific type of sword, the sword of the Holy Spirit which is the word of God, which is a defensive tool. We have been exploring the numerous aspects of this sword the last two weeks. It is two-edged, able to unite opposing views fostering "both and" thinking and "yes and" conversations. God uses the sword like a precise surgeon on us, the ones carrying the sword, to remove anything that is causing loss of life and filling us with found abundant life.

Anne Lamott wrote, "It's funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox, full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty, bent old tools—friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty—and said, Do the best you can with these, they will have to do. And mostly, against all odds they're enough."

God equips each person with unique tools to help them love and live life to the fullest. As the seasons in our life change, our tools evolve as well. What tools are you using?

When I awake the first thing I do is to hold the herd of thoughts and "to dos" at bay by thinking of three things I am thankful for. I joyfully worship, singing hymns, and praise songs to God in the shower. I strive to mindfully eat. Thanking God for the unique tastes, all who have served to provide me with food and for the nourishment it provides. When my day starts spiraling in an unloving direction, I take a few seconds to picture myself with Jesus at the campsite beside a lake in the mountains. This recenters me, because I regularly pray a visualization prayer imagining I am hiking with Jesus enjoying the beauty. Some days Jesus helps carry the load. Other days Jesus encourages me to take on new loads of service. We sit beside a fire and talk. I strive to be gracious with myself and grateful to others. I strive to pause noticing simple things that fill me with wonder. I strive to let go, center with God, and let come by biking, skiing, doing the laundry, and walking the labyrinth. My thoughts run wild, so I take time to process them and ponder what is driving them. Eventually, I reach a state of inner silence. Now, I can better listen to how God wants me to be and how God wants me to serve. I plan times to be outside in nature where God refreshes me. I care and pray for you and all people. I am continually striving to do anything that enables someone to experience the grace of God. I strive to be in sync with the unforced rhythms of grace. I strive to share only positive, uplifting, inspiring news, stories, and comments. I choose love, peace, and joy. I strive to talk less and listen more. I enjoy movies with a massive tub of hot air popped popcorn with real butter supplied with love by dedicated dairy farmers. I regularly meet with a spiritual director. I seek the inspiration of Abigail's driven passion. I cherish my loving relationship with Leslie who makes me a more loving person.

What tools are you using to live life to the fullest and grow your love? Amen