

## How To Win The War We're In

This past Sunday we completed our study of the book of Ephesians by examining the book's closing exhortation about the challenges of life.

1. Warm up question. When you're facing hard times in life, what's your favorite escapist activity?
2. Sunday's Scripture can be divided into two parts – the first part discusses the nature of evil in this world, while the second part discusses how we can triumph over evil. Let's start with the first part – the nature of evil. Read Ephesians 6:10-12.
  - a. What lessons, thoughts, or insights do you draw from verse 12?
  - b. Verse 12 challenges us to think about the “cosmology of evil,” i.e., our theory as to the origin and source of evil in the world. The author of Ephesians envisioned evil as being strategically directed by “spiritual forces in heavenly places,” a reference to Satan and demons. Some of us still see it that way, while others of us see evil as an abstraction or something that originates solely inside each of us. What is your “cosmology of evil”? In other words, how would you answer if someone asked you: “What is evil and how does it work?”
  - c. Does it matter how we see evil? Why or why not?
  - d. Read I Peter 5:8. What lessons, thoughts, or insights do you draw from this verse?
  - e. Read Luke 22:31-34. Do you think Satan wants to try “to sift you like wheat?” If so, what does that mean? What does it look like? What does it feel like?
3. Although we may not all share the same cosmology of evil, we probably can all agree on the broader point that Ephesians 6:12 is making, namely, that every challenging situation we face is fraught with powerful unseen spiritual dynamics that must be addressed if we're going to triumph in that situation. Theologian John Piper puts it this way, “Whenever someone's flesh attacks me, or someone's blood boils against me, or my way is hindered by [another human], something else is going on, something deeper, bigger, more terrible, more sinister, more destructive than meets the eye.” To illustrate, Jeff shared the story of when Ashley Smith was held captive by Brian Nichols. Ashley read to Nichols from “The Purpose Driven Life,” and talked to him about how he needed to find hope again in his life.
  - a. What do you think of Ashley's response? Imagine yourself in her situation. How do you think you would have responded?
  - b. Think of a difficult situation you're facing right now. Share a brief description of what's going on, then think aloud about what might be the deeper spiritual dynamics of the situation. In other words, what negative emotional or spiritual

factors (affecting you or others) may be feeding the situation that need to be addressed for there to be a successful resolution?

4. The second part of Sunday's Scripture discusses how we can triumph over evil. It invites us to see ourselves as an ancient warrior equipped with a full suit of armor. Each piece of the armor represents a different powerful spiritual resource available to help us triumph in our struggles of life. On Sunday, we focused on three of the armor pieces. Read Ephesians 6:13-18.

a. Shield of Faith (vs. 16).

- i. Read Hebrews 11:1, then, using your own words, define what "faith" is.
- ii. On Sunday we watched a clip from the classic film "Miracle Worker," depicting Allen Sullivan's extraordinary efforts to teach Helen Keller. What lessons or insights did that clip offer for what faith looks like.
- iii. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. What does this passage tell us about what faith looks like?
- iv. Why is faith so powerful? What does it add to a situation of struggle?

b. Belt of Truth (vs. 14).

- i. Think of a time you experienced great challenge. What spiritual truth encouraged and strengthened your soul during that time of challenge?
- ii. Do you have a favorite Bible verse that lifts you in times of struggle?

c. Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (vs. 17).

- i. This is a reference, of course, to God's written word, but also, in the terminology of the early Christians, it's a reference to the "word" that God's Spirit might speak directly to you, or through you, in real time in any given situation. Do you believe God does that? Why or why not?
- ii. Have you ever experienced God speaking directly to, or through, you in a profound way – or observed this happening with someone else? Share the experience.
- iii. Words have enormous power to affect a situation – for evil or good. Jeff used the example of when someone once called him a "sissy" and another time someone called him "fearless." Is there a word that has been used for you (or against you) that has played a powerful role in your life?
- iv. Which of the three spiritual resources we've discussed do you most need to focus on to grow your power to combat evil?