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The Sword of the Spirit: Your Only Weapon for Winning the War Within Ephesians 6:10-17

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I said last week how it feels like people in our church have been under attack. And with a sermon title like “Winning the War Within,” I’m afraid that you’ll think because I’m preaching it that I know what I’m doing, like I’m some kind of great spiritual warrior, when I’m not. All I can claim is God is a great Redeemer. He can take your failures still tell His story, because it’s about His power. So whether your story involves cancer, illnesses, perpetual discouragement, relationships in trouble, or lives that have become so filled up you feel your schedule is on steroids, know that you too have been marked by Jesus as a soldier too.

The truth is, we’re in a war. Our worldview, the way we see the cosmos, is that, yes, I’m in a war. You’re in a war: for the hearts and minds of people. A war for good to win, no matter how dark the storm gets or how strong the evil seems. And you and I have been identified, as either a player, like a soldier, or as someone who will offer *no* opposition to the enemy, because we won’t take a stand. I suppose you *could* also simply wind up a casualty. Sort of like the 3 kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who stand around and wonder what just happened.

Every day, if you and I are following Jesus, we get dressed for battle...or not. Every day we either win a little back, or we lose ground. But hear me: most of the ground you will ever win or lose is within you yourself. The most violent, the most important, and the greatest battles ever won or lost are those fought on the soil of the human heart—your heart. The rest, the outward battles, are secondary. If we would win the battles that rage within our souls, you and I wouldn’t be facing *half* the battles and frustrations we’re living in right now. Just like wise people who make good decisions early they can spend the rest of their lives managing those good decisions, you and I can choose to win the inner battle for our soul, and spend the rest of our lives living out what’s been already won. And the cool thing is one of the ways we win our own battle is by helping others win the battles *they’re* waging for their very souls, because the very nature of God’s

Spirit is overflowing. Jesus said *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life...If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him or her.”* John 6:63 & 7:37-38.

The truth is, some of you look like you could use a drink! Like you’ve been through a battle! But the bigger truth is, many of us are like spies, really good at hiding your scars and defeats and thirst, putting on the masks and being who you think others want you to be. But when you do that, you hide one of the greatest elements of God’s story: how He’s redeemed you for Himself. So people don’t see you in the battle. They don’t even know there is a battle! But it’s true, isn’t it? Each one of us is one decision away from financial, spiritual, or marital ruin. That’s the battle.

Now. God’s Word has something to say about this whole inner battle. It’s nothing new. It was there in the beginning, with the Adam and Eve and the serpent. The fact is, the serpent never left...us alone, that is. Now, most of the time Satan can leave us alone, because we’re so goofed up in our own thinking we’ve entangled ourselves and tripped up so badly by our own wrong thinking that Satan doesn’t even need to consider us a player. So we keep going back to God’s Word. And there’s a reason. God knew if we were going to live for Him in such a way as to impact the world, it would be a battle. If you’re tired of the battle, and especially if you’re tired of being sidelined; listen:

Ephesians 6:10 *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

Did you catch it? Our battle is *not* just flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Freaky, huh? Notice this passage from Scripture. It says when you try to live out your faith like this, it’s tough and you’ll face opposition, even from within.

This passage to the Christ-followers in Ephesus reads like poetry, were you and I not in the middle of our own life and death battles right now. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, your feet fitted with the readiness of the Gospel of peace. There’s the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation...and the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. We’re talking you bringing divine resources to bear in your situation and in *every* situation. (Tired of being afraid? Tired of yelling at your kids? Tired of medicating yourself with alcohol or the internet?) Where are your divine resources? Why is it so

hard? I think our biggest problem is, somewhere along the way, WE DROPPED THE SWORD!!! What in the world is he talking about? What kind of church is this?!

We're talking using God's resources to help you stand, so you and I can "*Be strong in the Lord, and in His mighty power.*" God's mighty power is available for *you*. Remember when we began looking at the Holy Spirit in our lives, I reminded you to never think because something is invisible it is therefore unimportant or weak. The power of God is not magic: It is the fact of Jesus Christ, the power of God to make all things right.

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of waiting for someone else to show up and fix me. I'm tired of waiting for a leader to come around and make things better. This summer, I'm asking God to make me ready. I'm asking Jesus to fix me. And I want to make things better...in my life, and in the lives of those I care about. But notice that Paul writes it's *God's* armor. Some of us think we're so tough and have such a good scheme to put on our armor, when all *our* armor usually does is suffocate us and stiffen us up and make us less mobile. And note there's only one weapon for offense in this war within: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And Paul says "Take it!" The Word of God? That's like the Bible, isn't it? Yes.

Ugh! After all this, you're just going to tell me I "need to read the Bible more?" Yes. How can I understand it? Some simple rules:

1. Don't look for hidden meanings. God's Word is meant to unveil truth. Treat it as normal communication.
2. Don't read verse by verse. Read it in paragraphs. It wasn't until the 10th Century that they added the numbers to the verses. Same thing with chapter divisions. Most parts of the Bible are written in units of thought, not random verses. Go for the larger units to understand the bigger meaning.
3. Don't jump to conclusions. Read the Bible intelligently and think about what the passage is actually saying. For example, Jesus didn't ask every follower to sell all his possessions. He asked the one young man to teach him—his money was more important than God.
4. Don't read the Bible as a duty. Read God's Word expectantly. God has given us the Bible, and God meets us in the pages. Expect God to touch your heart and mind. Be open to learn. Read until there is something you do understand, and know that that is God's Spirit Himself speaking to you.
5. Find a way to respond. React to what you've read. It's not simply philosophy. Christian faith is a lived out faith. Hear it and do it. Take the initiative to try it.

It IS a fight. In the epic war we're engaged in, you can't expect to find the going easy. If you're going to be a player, it's a battlefield. You can't count on friendship with the world, only friendship with God. Be a warrior for God. The battle's already within you. It's not enough to be conquered. Only with the sword can you annoy the enemy. It's a fight. It's *not* a compromise. The Bible calls the adversary the "father of lies." Satan will say whatever it takes to get you to think you don't need God's best for your life. Paul is saying "*Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" Grasp the only "weapon" the Holy Spirit has, and fight. You don't win by accident. And it's no accident

Paul calls it a sword. It has properties like a sword: As God, the Holy Spirit is tender, like breath, but He is also like the mighty rushing wind. Peace, grace, judgment, and fire the Bible says.

The Word of God in the hand of the Holy Spirit wounds very terribly, and makes your heart bleed. Haven't you ever been cut to the heart with this Sword? You've probably been angry with it! But that sword pursued you, and pierced the secrets of your soul. And what a powerful and good thing that is. Because it's through the sword of the Spirit that my sins are slain and cut out. Your fears, and doubts, and despair, and unbelief, were also hacked to pieces by this same sword. The Word that gave me life was first a great killer in the war within my heart. There is no other sword but the Word of God. It contains the revelation of God—our only spiritual weapon, and it can cut to you no matter how much of your own armor you've tried to load up with.

I know God uses lots of ways to get people's attention: acts of service, acts of love, other spiritual books, loyal relationships, sometimes even a sermon...but the best of those are simply God's Word told in various ways. Steve reminded us of the power of discernment: The Spirit has an abundant ability to speak Himself; but He speaks God's Word: nothing more, nothing less. But you've got to take it. You're going to need it. Not "out there", but "in here." (your heart). We mean business. You may be fighting a battle in your heart in this moment. You're dealing with fierce opposition! You need to knock it so it's not going to be getting up again!

The Lord Jesus in the wilderness was tempted of the devil. He might have fought Satan with a thousand weapons; but he chose to defeat him with this one only. To all 3 challenges He said, "It is written; it is written; it is written." The Word of God can meet your every need. Not because God exists to meet you needs! But because God is the Creator, the Center of the universe. He's revealed Himself through the revelation of His Word, sharper than any two-edged sword.

Imagine if every person took up the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God? Now I know: some of us hate the thought of battle. (I'm a lover not a fighter!) But no matter how quiet you are, God needs you to find strength in His Word. Others of us *love* the thought of battle. But no matter how loud or strong you are, God needs you to be fighting the *right* battles—for Him. Our church may be 175 years old, but we have no staying power in and of ourselves, apart from the Word of God! No where are we told we may lay God's Word down. The demand for the sword of the Spirit is continuous. We must study it, not bury it.

Today, we have a gift for you. It's a pocket New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs. This is not the whole Bible, but it does fit in a small pocket or purse. If you don't know what to read first, stick your sermon notes in and begin with the study plan. Review the verses from today, or look at some early favorites of mine. But begin today...and don't leave home without it! Be caught reading it. Give it to the person who catches you if they don't have one.

Our church is seeking to make an impact in the world. We want to give God room to work. We can't DO that without equipping ourselves to be strong in the Lord and His power. Nothing can impact you more than God's Holy Spirit speaking to you through His Word. Now, let's draw our swords—Amen!