

IN THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

In these words of Jesus, found in Mat 11:28–29, there are two distinct calls. The first, in verse 28, is a call to salvation. In answering this call, the sinner lays down the burden of sin and guilt, and receives the gift of rest in his soul.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). The gift of salvation, which Jesus died to secure, cannot be earned; it can only be received by faith. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 6:23).

The second invitation, found in Mat 11:29, is directed to those who have responded to the first. It is a call to discipleship. The “yoke” of Christ is preparation for service. The new believer must *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2Pe 3:18). This requires diligent study, for we are learning not just to know, but to do His will. *“Study [be diligent] to present yourself approved to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2Ti 2:15).

It is significant that the word “learn” in verse Mat 11:29 is *mathete* from the root word for “disciple.” All who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation should become disciples. However, experience and observation tell us that relatively few answer this second call. There is a sense of urgency in using the aorist imperative. The reason for this is that discipleship means service. And the service in view is the cause of Christ, Who came into the world, *“to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luk 19:10). We sense this urgency in the burden of Jesus when He said, *“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send our laborers into His harvest”* (Mat 9:37–38).

This book is written with the prayer that it may give some initial guidance and direction to new believers in their quest to answer the call to discipleship. It may be also that the “Lord of the harvest” will be pleased to use it also to call many who, having answered the call to salvation some time ago, are now challenged to enter into the arena of discipleship. It is never too late to take up the yoke of service!

Armed and Able to Stand

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians (Eph 6:10–13), the Apostle Paul concludes this great letter with the Armor of God. In this section are found eight disciplines, which are the essence of discipleship. The objective of these areas of spiritual mastery is that we might “stand” on the

field of battle as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. The “yoke” of service to Christ and the “armor” of the Christian soldier are the same. Like the 318 servants of Abraham who were “born in his[own] house” (Gen 14:14), we are to be “trained” and “armed” for battle. The format of this study will follow these eight disciplines:

- 1. The Belt of Truth: Personal Bible study**
How to study the Bible for maximum benefit and growth
- 2. The Breastplate of Righteousness: The Spirit-filled life**
How to enter and maintain a life of spiritual power and purpose
- 3. The Sandals of the Gospel: Christian service**
The three areas of individual preparation and service
- 4. The Shield of Faith: The faith-rest life**
What does the Scripture mean “the just shall live by faith”?
- 5. The Helmet of salvation: Personal security and stability in life**
The necessity of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ
- 6. The Sword of the Spirit: Fulfilling the great commission**
How to evangelize and disciple others
- 7. The Power of Spiritual Prayer: The believer’s lifeline**
How to pray with confidence and effectiveness
- 8. The Spiritual War: Knowing and meeting the enemy**
How to avoid being a casualty in the battle for souls

Discipline 1: The Belt of Truth

The importance of personal Bible study

In the preparation of the Roman soldier for battle, the first article of equipment taken up was the broad belt. The sword and breastplate, along with other necessary articles, were attached. Remember that Paul wrote Ephesians from a Roman prison. This “prison” was in fact “house arrest,” where he was under constant guard by Roman soldiers (Act 28:30). These were members of the elite Praetorian Guard, many of whom he led to a saving faith in the Lord (Phi 1:12–13).

Paul saw in the belt and shoulder strap, which supported it, an analogy to the importance of personal Bible study. Everything in the life of a believer depends upon it. The Word of God is the foundation of all spiritual life. The goal is to “stand” in the face of the enemy, and the means to that end is to take up each article of armor. In terms of discipleship, this means to establish the daily disciplines of the Christian life.

The Key to Faith

We are told, in Rom 10:17 that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Since faith is born out of receiving God’s Word, so also it must be sustained. The Word of God strengthens

our soul and gives us confidence in God, resulting in courage for life. It is in the Bible that we find the answers to the problems and difficulties of life. To say *“the just shall live by faith”* (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38) is the same as saying, “the believer must live by the Word of God.”

The Key to Growth

Spiritual hunger is one of the first evidences of new life. The soul that is renewed by faith craves the Word of God. *“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious”* (1Pe 2:2–3). Where this hunger is absent, there is reason to question the genuineness of the claim to conversion. Spiritual growth will soon be evident, as this hunger leads from simple *“milk”* to *“solid food”* in the deeper truths of the Word of God (see Heb 5:11–14).

The Key to Sanctification

The word “sanctify” means to “set apart to God” and includes the idea of purification. This is the product of Bible study combined with obedience. We certainly cannot obey what we do not know. *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever”* (1Pe 1:22–23). Spiritual love can only come from purity, and purity is the product of faithful study of and obedience to the Word of God. *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You”* (Psa 119:11).

The Key to Stability

At the moment of regeneration, the believer becomes a target of Satan and the fallen realm of angels. Only grounding in the Word of God can provide necessary stability in the face of their organized attack on the soul. *“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ ...”* (1Pe 1:13). Once again the figure of the belt is used as symbolic of that which is foundational in the spiritual life.

It has been well said, “Bibles that are falling apart usually belong to those who aren’t.” Stability is the result of study!

The Key to Victory

The spiritual life is a battle! The context of Ephesians six is conflict. The prospect is either victory or defeat. We see many defeated Christians, and the primary cause is the absence of effective study of the Word of God. *“And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb [faith in Jesus] and by the word of their testimony [the Bible], and they did not love their lives to the death”* (Rev 12:11).

Even when we fall into sin, it is God's Word which restores and revives us. *"My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your Word" (Psa 119:25). "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1Jo 5:4–5).*

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

The list of benefits from the study of the Word of God could go on and on. All of these could be collectively called "wisdom." *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa 19:7).* Jesus said, *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Mat 7:24).* As the *"belt of truth"* must be put on daily, the following are some suggestions for daily Bible study for the new believer and disciple:

Be Prepared to Study

Come to the Word of God with a humble and teachable attitude. Begin with prayer, including confession of any known sins (1Jo 1:9), and a request for the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Joh 14:26, Joh 16:13).

Be Reverent Toward God

When we approach the Word of God, we are entering into His very presence. As Moses was told before the burning bush *"the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exo 3:5).* We must surrender to His authority, and be eager to obey when He speaks. The Spirit of God will speak to us through the Bible in that *"still small voice"* as He did to Elijah (1Ki 19:12). *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Pro 9:10).*

Be Consistent

The Word of God is nourishment for our souls. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4).* We should be in the Word daily, just as we eat daily. You may not remember all that you read daily, any more than you remember what you ate last week—it will strengthen you just the same.

Begin at the Center

God works from the center to the circumference in our lives. He starts in the spirit, works through the soul, and out from the body (Phi 2:12–13; 1Th 5:23). We should study the same way. Begin at the heart of the Bible—the Gospels. Learn about the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This lays a foundation for understanding all the Old Testament and the Epistles. Remember that the Bible is one unit, from beginning to end.

Be Systematic

Don't jump around! Read a book, chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse. As a teenager, I used to read a chapter each day and try to apply what I learned to that day. My children have developed the same discipline, and their gain is obvious. Recognize that what you don't understand will become clear as other Scripture sheds light on it, "*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*" (1Co 2:13). Mark Twain said, "*It is not what I don't understand about the Bible that troubles me, but the things I do understand.*" We should obey what we do understand, and leave the rest for God to make clear later.

Be Transformed

The Word will change our life if we let it. In learning the Word we are to "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" to do the will of God (Rom 12:2). It is the change wrought by an attitude of surrender that is the heart of true worship (Gen 22:5; Rom 12:1). This is why Jesus said, "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (Joh 4:24). In every PASSAGE, find the PRINCIPLE, to apply to your PRACTICE.

Be United With Others

The local church is ordained by the Lord as a place of worship, training, and fellowship (Act 2:42, 5:42). Find a Bible-believing and teaching church led by a gifted pastor-teacher. The Body of Christ—the Church—is built by the teaching of God's Word (Eph 4:11–16). To fail to take advantage of this provision is "*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*" (Heb 10:25).

Be Diligent

In all our study, we should make an effort to commit to memory what we are learning. Bible study is "inhale" that will later require "exhale." We will see this under the "*sword*" figure of the armor. Any careful reading of the Gospels or Epistles will convince us that the authors had committed a tremendous amount of Scripture to memory. Memorization requires repetition, but there is no substitute for having the instant recall of a verse or principle at the appropriate time. "*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another ...*" (Col 3:16).

Discipline 2: The Breastplate of Righteousness

The Spirit-filled life

The tense of the verbs here implies that before we can take our stand we have to put on the armor. The breastplate logically follows the belt, both for the Roman soldier and for the Christian soldier. The breastplate was attached to the belt. Without the belt, the breastplate could not be secured. It was designed to protect the vital organs, and speaks here of practical sanctification, or what we will call the Spirit-filled life. It is righteousness in the practical sense.

Without it, we leave ourselves open to the devil's attack. Sin in our life gives the enemy a place to work (Eph 4:27). The Roman breastplate only covered the front, for there was no thought of turning the back to the enemy!

The Gift of Righteousness

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we receive His righteousness as a free gift of God's grace. This gift cost Christ everything, for "[God] *made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2Co 5:21). God's plan of salvation has never changed, for as "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*" (Gen 15:6, Rom. 4:3) even so, "*It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*" (Rom. 4:24), "*Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe*" (Rom 3:22).

The Practice of Righteousness

Because God has already given us His righteousness, we have all the spiritual resources—through His Spirit—to live daily in a right relationship with Him. The Spirit of God empowers us to utilize our spiritual resources. As we submit to God, we are available "*to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man*" (Eph 3:16). We have the power of God available to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death ... so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Rom 8:2, Rom 8:4). It is the Spirit-filled life that is the "*breastplate*" that protects our spiritual "*vitals*" from the thrust of the enemy!

The Spirit-Filled Life

The New Testament places great emphasis on the ministry of the Spirit of God in the believer's life. Unfortunately, there is so much distortion today among modern charismatics, that most Christians are ignorant of the true nature and purpose of the Spirit's working. I will not labor to deal with all the current false teachings on this vital subject. Put plainly, the work of the Spirit is to reproduce the life of Jesus in the disciple. "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Gal 2:20). In another place Paul says, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phi 1:21). For this reason, Paul speaks of "*the Spirit of Christ ... who is in you*" (Rom 8:9–10).

Concerning the true spiritual life there are four commands:

1. "*Be filled with the Spirit*"

This command, which is found in Eph 5:18, speaks of the ideal Christian life. The word translated "*filled*" suggests supply for a deficiency (see 2Co 2:16 and 2Co 3:5–6), along with the

idea of being controlled and influenced by God's Spirit. The present imperative means "keep on being filled." This implies that we must cooperate. We see this cooperation in such phrases as "Let not sin reign in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12), and "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts ... let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:15-16). Notice how the idea of reigning or ruling is repeated here. Paul assures us that "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17). This self-mastery is the Spirit-filled life!

2. *"Grieve not the Spirit"*

Turning to Eph 4:30, we find the first condition which interferes with the Spirit-filled life. The context of verses 25-31 tells us that it is sin in our life that grieves the indwelling Spirit of God. In fact verse 24 is a plea to "put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." This "new man" (spiritual lifestyle), living in the power of the Holy Spirit, is living a life pleasing to God. When we find that sin in our life has grieved the Spirit, we are told to confess it and forsake it that we might be cleansed and restored to a right relation to God (Pro 28:13; 1Jo 1:9). Daily self-examination and confession is essential to the disciple (1Co 11:28, 31).

3. *"Quench not the Spirit"*

This command from 1Th 5:19 deals with another hindrance to the control of the Spirit. Whereas the previous command concerned sins of commission, here we must deal with sins of omission. From 1Th 5:11-22, we have at least 18 commands. When we resist the commands of the Bible, we resist God's Spirit. Jesus said to the people of His day, "It is the Spirit who gives life ... the words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life" (Joh 6:63). When Paul said to Timothy, "stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2Ti 1:6), he uses a word that means to "stir up the fire." No doubt this warning was necessary because Timothy had failed to heed Paul's earlier warning.

Apathy to the things of God will surely result in the quenching of the Spirit!

4. *"Walk in the Spirit"*

In the four spiritual commands, two are negative ("*grieve not*" and "*quench not*"), and two are positive ("*be filled*" and "*walk in the Spirit*"). If the disciple has confessed any and all known sin, has chosen to yield to the Spirit's leading, he may then maintain a life of spiritual power by "walking in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16, 25). This implies a moment-by-moment dependence. Again, using the soldier analogy, Paul says, "Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments [weapons] of righteousness to God" (Rom 6:13).

In summary, we can say that the Spirit of God indwells every believer for the purpose of making us like Christ. The Spirit-filled life is the Christ-centered life. If we daily discipline ourselves, we will maintain a life under the control and influence of "the Spirit of Christ." Such

a life will be marked by the sure fruits of the Spirit (Joh 15:1–8; 1Co 13:4–8; Gal 5:22). It is God's will that each believer be able to say, "Christ lives in me." Then it will be true of us that, *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1Jo 1:7). Then, and only then, have we *"put on the breastplate of righteousness."* The believer is then protected in the "vitals" of the spiritual life, maintaining a right relation of fellowship with God.

Discipline 3: The Sandals of the Gospel

Christian Service

The Roman soldier was famed throughout the ancient world for his ability to march long distances (up to 30 km in five hours), drop his pack, and go into battle. This capability was due to intensive training and endurance, and to the "combat-sandals" which he wore. These were the forerunner of the modern combat boot. Their heavy-lugged soles gave secure footing, and the tight weaving of heavy straps protected the feet and ankles. The value of the sandal was realized only through much exertion, for which reason Paul calls them the *"preparation of the gospel of peace"* (Eph 6:15). The word used here suggests a firm foundation based on extensive preparation.

The Disciple's Three-fold Preparation

Sandals and feet in Scripture are suggestive of service. For example, in the parable of the prodigal (Luke 15), upon his return to the Father, he is supplied — among other things — with new sandals for his feet. In Isa 52:7 and Rom 10:15, we read *"how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things."* Probably because of these verses, the sandals spoken of in Eph 6:15 are often only related to the work of evangelism. However, we must not overlook the fact that they are *"the preparation of the gospel of peace."* I think it is safe to say that much evangelism goes on without much *"preparation."*

1. Personal Preparation as a Priest

In 1Pe 2:4–10, we find a teaching unique to the New Testament. We are told that every believer in Jesus Christ is a member of *"a holy priesthood"* and a *"royal priesthood."* The only royal priesthood in Scripture is that of the order of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18–20) over which Jesus Christ presides as High Priest (Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6; Heb 5:10; Heb 7:21). As members of His Body, we share in His priesthood.

Our two-fold function is given as that of offering *"spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God"* and of proclaiming *"the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* In short, the priest was to reveal God to men and to lead men to God (Heb 5:1–4). The priest offered sacrifices for cleansing, first *"for himself and for the people's sins"* (Lev 16:24; Heb 9:7). Our offering is confession for our own sins, and intercession in behalf of others. *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His*

name" (Heb. 13:15). *"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men"* (1Ti 2:1). Having faithfully prayed for specific people, we are more prepared to proclaim to them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Collective Preparation as a Body

Beyond the personal preparation each must make, there is necessity of the entire Body being prepared. Christian service is a team effort! No area of our service to the Lord stands alone— isolated from others.

Within the local church, various gifts are (or should be) at work to build up the whole. As the pastor teaches the Word of God by his gift, the result is *"the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry"* (Eph 4:12a), so that as other gifts begin to minister, they work *"for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Eph 4:12b). Since every believer is given *"the manifestation of the Spirit ... for the profit of all"* (1Co 12:7), we are commanded, *"as each one has received a gift, [let us] minister to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"* (1Pe 4:10). We are not only all priests, we are all ministers!

3. United Advance as Ambassadors

Only when individual believers are prepared as priests, and the Body of Christ is being strengthened by many gifts, are we able to advance in the way Christ envisioned His triumphant Church. *"On this [R]ock I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it"* (Mat 16:18). Satan knows that the Church united is a Church triumphant and unstoppable. Little wonder that he spends so much time working to divide the family of God. And he finds so many willing helpers! *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"*(2Co 5:20). But the church that is unable to reconcile within itself will never have power in bringing men into reconciliation with God.

The disciple, then, is to put on the sandals, which will give a secure footing in service to God.

This requires much preparation, as Paul suggests. We must develop our Christian service: as a priest who is washed and cleansed for service, as a minister who builds up others in the Body of Christ, and as an effective ambassador calling the lost to Christ. A local church where many disciples are engaged in these disciplines will be a powerful force for the building up of the saints and the winning of the lost to Christ. *"He who wins souls is wise"* (Pro 11:30).

Discipline 4: The Shield of Faith

The Faith-Rest Life

What does the Scripture mean *"the just shall live by faith"*? The Roman soldier spent as much time learning the use of the shield as he did the sword. They worked together as defense and offense. The shield was a large rectangular shape, like a door. Called in Latin the *scutum*, it was

made of wood, covered with leather, and edged with iron. Often before battle it was soaked in water, for the very purpose of putting out flaming arrows. Just as the sandals suggest that we are advancing, so also the shield suggests that such advance will be met by resistance from the enemy. It is axiomatic that those who are most aggressive in the spiritual realm will face the brunt of opposition and persecution. For this we must be prepared. It is just after He has spoken of the peacemakers (ministers of reconciliation) that Jesus says, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake"* (Mat 5:10) and Paul assures us that *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2Ti 3:12).

This shield is called specifically *"the shield of faith."* It speaks of faith, not as taking in God's Word, but as using it to meet life's problems. It is an illustration of the faith-rest life. Jesus said one of the benefits of the life of a disciple is *"you will find rest for your souls"* (Mat 11:29). We are told, *"the just shall live by faith"* (Rom 1:17), as quoted from Hab 2:4. And the product of faith is rest,—hence, the faith-rest life! It means a life of inner peace and calm, based on trust in the faithfulness of God. In the midst of changing circumstances, our God never changes. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Heb. 13:8).

The immutability (unchangeableness) of Jesus Christ is reflected in the Word of God. *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Mat 24:35). We can trust the promises of the Word of God. In the trials of life, our souls can find rest by trusting in the unshakeable promises He has given us.

In Hebrews 4, we are given an overview of the faith-rest life. And what is this life? In the book *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, chapters 14 and 15 relate how this great missionary—after years of spiritual struggle—found the way into what they called, *"soul-rest."* This was nothing more than resting by faith in the clear and sure promises of God. Four times in both the Old and New Testaments we are told, *"The just [saved] shall live by faith."* This is the faith-rest life. Look at Hebrews chapter four.

Ingredients of the Faith-Rest Life: Hebrews 4

It is entered by mixing the promises of God's Word with pure faith. *"For we who have believed do enter that rest,"* (see Heb 4:1–3a). The verbs here indicate that we cannot enter until first we trust!

By faith, we enter a sharing of God's *"rest"* in His finished work. *"The works were finished from the foundation of the world"* (Heb 4:3b). In Gen 2:2 we are told that God rested because His work was done. Everything necessary for the fulfillment of His grand plan was put into motion. And so we read that the Lamb of God was *"slain from the foundation of the world"* (Rev 13:8), His kingdom was just as surely prepared for all who believe *"from the foundation of the world"* (Mat 25:34), and the names of all who would believe were *"written in the Lamb's Book of Life"* (Rev 21:27). This is why Jesus on the cross cried out *"It is finished!"* (Joh 19:30).

Men are invited throughout history to enter into this rest (Heb 4:6–9). Every generation of men has been invited to enter His rest. But to those who “harden their hearts” and do not believe God’s Word, He says, “*they shall not enter My rest*” (Heb 4:5–7).

The faith-rest life is a moment-by-moment sabbath (Heb 4:9–10). The word “rest” in Heb 4:9 is *sabbatismos*, meaning “sabbath-rest.” On the Sabbath, men were to “cease from their own works” and rest in the provision of God (see Exo 16:22–26). When we claim the promises of God, we are resting in His provision for us. This means that we trust in His work in our behalf. “*Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe In Him whom He sent’*” (Joh 6:28–29).

The faith-rest involves diligent study of and active obedience to the Word of God (Heb 4:11–12). The word “*diligent*” here is the same one found in 2Ti 2:15. Since we must believe the Word of God to enter His rest (Heb 4:2–3), it follows that daily rest requires daily study in faith.

We must be open to correction and confession of sin (Heb 4:12–13). God’s Word convicts us and corrects our thoughts, motives and actions. When we are “reproved” (2Ti 3:16), we should confess our sin for cleansing and restoration to fellowship with God. “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1Jo 1:9). Confession keeps us honest with ourselves and with God. Sin in our life breaks our communion with God, and unconfessed sin remains a barrier to the enjoyment of His power and blessing in our life. There is no rest in our soul when we grieve or quench the Spirit of God.

There is focus on Jesus Christ through prayer (Heb 4:14–16). Later (Heb 12:2), we are told to keep “*looking unto Jesus.*” As He speaks to us through His Word, we are to respond to Him in our prayers. Spiritual communication is necessary to maintain a vital spiritual relationship with God. No relationship can thrive without regular communication. Jesus represents us in the presence of God. We are to represent Him before men. We will only “*hold fast our confession*” or witness, as we “*come boldly to the throne of grace*” in prayer. It is here we will find His mercy and grace to be all-sufficient for help in every need.

When we claim the promises contained in God’s Word, we are taking up the “*shield of faith.*” In Heb 6:17–19, we are assured that the Word of God cannot be broken. Claiming His promises will give us “*strong consolation*” and the hope we receive will become for us “*an anchor of the soul*” which can give stability in every trial of life. As a disciple, you will need daily to take up the shield of faith, and enter into the faith-rest life. By this alone are we able to “*quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one*” (Eph 6:16).

Discipline 5: The Helmet of Salvation

Personal Security and Stability in Life

The soldier’s helmet was extremely important in time of battle. It was for the protection of the head—the most vital of the body’s members. By a spiritual analogy, the head implies thinking,

which is the basis for all our actions. The Scripture is clear on the critical importance of having a biblical mind.

With the helmet protecting the head, the Roman soldier could advance boldly and fearlessly into the battle. Our helmet is called the “*helmet of salvation*” because it speaks of a mind, or mental attitude, which is secure because salvation is certain. We have security in this life because we have eternal life in the next. We call this “eternal security.” It is the conviction that eternal life is eternal! It is not—as some falsely conclude—“provisional” or “probationary.”

The Roman helmet was made of bronze, equipped with extensions, which covered the nose, ears, and neck. Though impervious to any blows on the battlefield, the helmet was lined with fur and was soft and comfortable on the inside. Our salvation can stand up to any of the blows of life, for as Paul says, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:35, 39). Notice that he says no person (who) and no thing (what)!

The application of this great truth is simply to live in that boldness which faces tests and trials in this life with the calm assurance that we are secure in Christ. I would encourage you to read and reflect on Rom 8:18–39. It is filled with the promise of security for the believer. And in this security we have stability in life, which nothing else can provide. We are assured of that.

I have noticed that Christians who deny the security of the believer’s salvation are never very bold. They believe in playing it safe. The early disciples were known by their boldness (Act 4:13). They prayed for boldness (Act 4:29), and their prayers were answered (Act 4:31). Even Paul—one of the boldest of Apostles—requests prayer for greater boldness in Eph 6:19–20. We need to be bold in our witness and bold in our living. Even after Paul had failed through disobedience (see Acts 21) and had been disciplined by God, he wrote from his prison cell expressing his assurance that, “*according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phi 1:20–21).

Paul’s boldness reflected his security in Christ. He had taken up the helmet of salvation, and was able to stand in the battle unafraid! When doubts and fears assail your mind, think on what a foundation your salvation rests.

The Work of Christ FOR You

1. He died for our sins “*once for all*” (Heb 7:27). This is the meaning of the Greek word *hapax* used in Hebrews.
2. He died for our sins “*once for all*” so that men need not die because of sin “*once for all*” (Heb 9:27–28).

3. We have been set apart (sanctified) to God through His cross *“once for all”* (Heb 10:10).
4. By His victorious life and substitutionary death, we have been *“perfected forever”* (Heb 10:14), which is exactly the same thing said of His humanity (Heb 7:28).
5. Because the work of Jesus is *“finished”* (Joh 19:30), our sins are forgiven and forgotten, and no other sacrifice can be offered (Heb 10:17–18). This is true even in the case of *“willful sin”* as seen in Heb 10:26. Those who doubt the all-sufficiency of the work of Christ in their behalf are guilty of having *“counted the blood of the covenant by which [they were] sanctified a common thing, and [have] insulted the Spirit of grace”* (Heb 10:29).

The Work of Christ IN You

1. **The Baptism of the Spirit**, 1Co 12:13. At the moment of believing in Christ, you were placed into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. You are in the family of God! This means being *“united with Christ”* in the benefits of His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:4–5). In His death, the penalty of sin is paid. By His burial, the power of sin is broken, and in His resurrection, the practice of sin is conquered!
2. **The Regeneration of the Spirit**, Tit 3:5. This is what Jesus called being *“born again”* in Joh 3:5, 7. Peter uses the same phrase in 1Pe 2:23. This means we have entered into spiritual life as *“a new creature”* in Christ (1Co 5:17). We have been *“created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph 4:24).
3. **The Indwelling of the Spirit**, Rom 8:9. According to Jesus’ promises in John chapters 13–17, the Holy Spirit has come to be our Helper, Teacher, Guide, and Comforter in the spiritual life. Christ is in us through His Spirit (Rom 8:10), and as we yield to the Spirit’s leading (Rom 8:14), He will live in us as surely as He did in the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:20).
4. **The Gifting of the Spirit**, 1Co 12:7. Every believer is a member of the Body of Christ (1Co 12:12–20). Each member has a part to play, a task to perform. For this work we are empowered by the Spirit of God. This gift becomes effective through the learning of the Word of God, *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph 4:12).
5. **The Sealing of the Spirit**, Eph 4:30. We are told here that we are *“sealed for the day of redemption.”* In this context, the problem of sin in the believer’s life and the resulting *“grieving the Holy Spirit”* is addressed. All sin in our lives should be confessed and corrected quickly, yet there is great comfort in knowing that while sin will grieve the Spirit, it will not break His sealing of our soul for eternity.

And so we conclude—as we began—with the helmet of salvation being an assurance of our

security in Christ. What He has done for us, and in us, will never change, because He never changes. He remains *“the same yesterday, and today, and forever”* (Heb 13:8).

Discipline 6: The Sword of the Spirit

Fulfilling the Great Commission

The Roman short sword—and its use—brought about a revolution in warfare in the ancient world. In the face of the long, curved sabers of the Asian hordes, and the great double-edged swords of the Thracian Barbarians, the sword of the Roman soldier seemed puny. Called the *machaira* in Scripture, the Word of God is likened to a *“sharp, two-edged sword”* (Heb 4:12). Its power was in its ability to pierce deeply. In fact, in battle, the Roman historian Vegetius says that recruits *“learned to strike, not with the edge, but with the point”* (*The Roman Soldier*, G. R. Watson). So ingrained was this training that he also declared the Roman soldier *“laughed at those who would slash with the sword.”* It is the power of the Word of God to pierce the heart that the author has in mind in Heb 4:12.

Though the typical Roman soldier was small in comparison to the warriors of other nations, Rome conquered the world. This was done by intensive training, mental and physical discipline, and teamwork. It was the motto of Vegetius that, *“There is nothing which constant practice does not make easy.”* Though only about as long as the distance from one’s elbow to the fingertips, the Roman short sword became the most feared weapon of the ancient world. But the secret to its effectiveness was in two disciplines drilled into the soldiers: These were, firstly, to stand together. The Roman army fought as an indivisible unit. This is what the Church should be! Secondly, the individual soldier learned to stand firm. That is, he knew that the success of the whole army was related to his personal victory.

Again quoting Vegetius, *“There is nothing which proved to be of greater service in action than for the men to learn by constant practice to keep their allotted positions in the line, and nowhere to close or to open their ranks disadvantageously.”* Surely it was just this discipline which Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Philippian believers, saying, *“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel”* (Phi 1:27).

In fact, the word Paul uses for *“stand”* (*stete*) in Eph 6:11 and Eph 6:13–14 was the battle cry of the elite Roman soldier. With their rigid devotion to duty, intensive training, and battlefield disciplines these soldiers of old flung the borders of Rome far and wide. But we also have been given a commission (Mat 28:18–20). We are to advance with the *“sword of the Spirit”* for the expansion of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In the battle for souls, we have been given only one offensive weapon. To use it well we must practice, memorize, and develop skill in utilizing its power to pierce the soul with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Learn to bring the point of the Word of God to bear on the needs of those around you—for the salvation of their souls, and the glory of Jesus Christ.

Tactics of Spiritual Swordsmanship

1. The proper use of the Spirit's sword speaks of effective witnessing. Every believer is called to be an ambassador of Christ, 2Co 5:20.
2. Persistent preparation prevents poor performance. Take note that the sword is not taken up for offensive use until first things have been mastered.
 - a. The Belt: consistent, systematic Bible study
 - b. The Breastplate: practical obedience to God's will
 - c. The Sandals: basic service in three areas of spiritual life
 - d. The Shield: learning to live the faith-rest life
 - e. The Helmet: conviction and stability based on eternal security

Certainly, new believers can and should witness (Joh 4:29). But we are talking here of developing skill and effectiveness as a disciple.

3. Become one with your weapon. To the Roman soldier, the sword was but an extension of his hand, eyes, and footwork. For the Christian soldier, the Word is not an extension of us, but we are to become a reflection of it.
4. Train constantly to develop greater skill. The more familiarity we have with the Word, the greater ease we will have in using it to present Jesus Christ. Memorize!
5. Be unconditionally devoted to the King and His cause. No matter how much preparation you have, ultimately it comes down to overcoming all the fears and barriers and proclaiming Jesus Christ as Savior! The means for accomplishing this is found in the last aspect of the "full" armor.

Discipline 7: The Power of Spiritual Prayer

The Believer's Lifeline

Coming at the end of the list of the full armor, this reminder is to tell us that each step in the above process of preparation for the spiritual warrior should be accompanied with prayer. Prayer is our "radio" to headquarters. By it, we call for supply and support in times of need. Every facet of spiritual life and action should follow prayer. In the earthly life of Jesus, no discipline required more time or concentration than His prayer life.

"The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" - Jam 5:16

The quote of James above contains some significant instruction about prayer. First, the emphasis in the original is that prayer is intended to be powerful. "Avails much" is from *ischuo*, the strongest of five Greek words for "might or power." This word is usually used for God's

inherent power. When Paul says *"I can do all things"* in Phi 4:13, he uses this word for the power received from Jesus Christ. It is worth noting that when Jesus teaches about prayer, He always emphasizes that prayer—properly entered into—is certain to receive answers.

Second, James tells us that only *"a righteous man"* can expect such effectiveness in prayer. Since righteousness is a gift to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21–22, Rom 4:3, Rom 4:23–24), the one praying must be a child of God by faith (Joh 1:12). The word *dikaiois* simply means "one who is justified." However, we must also be living in that same righteousness which we have received. In other words, we must be in fellowship with God. There can be no sin in our lives, which has not been confessed and corrected (1Jo 1:7–9; Psa 66:18). A life of obedience to God's Word gives assurance of effective prayer.

Third, we are told that the prayer must be *"effective."* The words that are translated "effectual fervent" both come from the word *energeo*, which is the root for our word "energy." Here it is a temporal participle, which includes a sense of time. We would understand this by including the phrase "as long as" or "whenever." The middle voice indicates that the one praying is receiving benefit from his prayer. We might better grasp the meaning by expanding the translation a bit. "The prayer request of an obedient believer displays divine power whenever it is made effectively."

Let's consider in what ways the Bible says prayer is made effective. As an example, we will take the "model prayer" taught by Jesus in Luk 11:2–4. This lesson on prayer was given in response to the request of the disciples, *"Lord, teach us to pray."*

Motivation, Luk 11:2a

This is a request by a child of God for the Lord to be glorified by answering the prayer. The ultimate desire behind all prayer should not be getting what we want, but for God to act in every situation to bring men and women to trust Him. God is glorified when His power is displayed in such a way as to bring men to faith (Mat 5:16; Joh 15:8). This is what it actually means to "pray in Jesus name." Jesus said in Joh 14:13, *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* And again in Joh 15:16b, *"That whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."* When we pray, we must be sure our underlying motive is for an answer which will display God's glory and bring men to Him.

Dedication, Luk 11:2b

In all our praying, there must be a commitment to the will of God. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God does not come with observation ... indeed, the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luk 17:20–21). God's kingdom is where His will is done. We must learn to surrender to the perfect will of God. Jesus, in the Garden prayed, *"not as I will, but as You will"* (Mat 26:39). Finally, we are told, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He*

hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1Jo 5:14–15).

Expectation, Luk 11:3–4

To be effective and powerful, prayer must be offered in faith. And faith expects God to answer when we call! If we do not pray with the expectation of answers, our prayer is useless. Four specific areas of need and dependence are cited here.

- 1. Provision:** There is dependence on God to provide our daily needs. Remember in this that we are taught to be content with the basic necessities of life (1Ti 6:6–10).
- 2. Forgiveness:** God has promised to forgive our sins on the basis of the cross of Jesus Christ (1Jo 1:9; Isa 1:18). When we come to Him *"that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:16b), we can be sure He will be faithful.
- 3. Enablement:** It is necessary that we be *"forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave [us]"* (Eph 4:32). So important is this that Jesus goes on to expound on its absolute necessity in the parallel passage of Mat 6:14–15. To express the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ to others, we must depend upon His enablement through the Spirit.
- 4. Deliverance:** When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, we declare war on Satan and his hosts. He will attack us using trial and temptation to try to destroy our faith or our witness. *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1Pe 5:8). We are able to *"resist him, steadfast in the faith"* (1Pe 5:9), and faith is a trusting dependence on God.

This is what Paul means in Eph 6:18 when he says, *"praying always ... in the Spirit."* It is the Spirit within by which we have fellowship with God, and our prayers are energized.

Discipline 8: The Spiritual War

Knowing and Overcoming the Enemy

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" Eph 6:11–13.

In these few verses we are introduced to the battlefield environment in which we live as soldiers of Christ. In this spiritual war, the object is to avoid becoming a casualty, and instead to be an overcomer by means of faith. Basic orientation to this conflict requires that we know three things, which Paul reveals in these verses:

1. The Enemy

Our spiritual adversary is the devil and his hosts of fallen angels. We read of his rebellion, which predates the creation of man, in Isa 14:12–15 and in Eze 28:11–19. Here we learn of the revolt of Lucifer, mightiest of the angels. He is called “*the anointed cherub who covers*” whom God had created as “*the seal of perfection*” in wisdom and beauty. His unique position was “*on the holy mountain of God,*” which speaks of God’s Throne Room. This, in addition to his covering of precious stones and his relation to music, implies that he was the high priest of the angels, leading them in the worship of God.

Picture then the tragic drama, which was played out in heavenly places, as this closest created being to God formulated a diabolical plot to overthrow his Creator. Five times in Isaiah 14, he declares his intention to exalt himself above the throne of God and make himself “*like the Most High.*” The sad divine commentary is given, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor ... you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.” And so it was that Lucifer, “*son of the morning*” became “*the great dragon ... that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan*” (Rev 12:9).

However, when Satan was cast out, he was not alone. His devilish scheme had deceived one-third of the angels into joining in his rebellion (Rev 12:4). These fallen angels who became devils in their own right make up the armies of which Paul speaks in the Eph 6:12. Paul’s words picture Satan’s ruling council—having authority over world-rulers—under whose dark command an innumerable host of spirits carry out his will. And that evil will is to use every means necessary to resist the righteous will and work of the God of heaven and earth.

2. The Strategy

When speaking of “*the wiles of the devil*” (Eph 6:11), Paul uses the word *methodeia*. Satan’s crafty strategy to oppose God brought this invisible conflict into the human race. The record of the temptation of Eve, and the fall of Adam, is recorded in Genesis 3. Since God had given Adam dominion over the whole earth, his fall passed this rule to the devil, who then became “*the god of this age [world]*” (2Co 4:4). On his continuing quest to exalt himself in God’s likeness, the devil chose to counterfeit everything divine. In the place of faith, which depends totally on a holy and loving God, Satan substitutes religion, which tells man what he can do to improve himself. In this way, the lust for self-exaltation is passed from fallen angel to fallen man. Religion, in whatever form it takes, is the devil’s chief strategy to keep men from coming to God in faith.

We see this conflict immediately in Genesis 4. Because Abel believed God’s promise of a coming Redeemer (Gen 3:15), he offered as the evidence of his faith a lamb from the flock. By doing this he was depicting his trust in the one and only “*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (Joh 1:29). But Cain chose the way of religion in rejecting the need for the sacrificial element in man’s redemption, he fell for the lie of the devil, that the fruit of his own labor was

sufficient. Because his “religion” was rejected by God, he revealed the diabolical side of religion by killing Abel, his brother.

In this we see the root of all persecution of biblical faith by religious fanatics throughout history, as well as all wars fought in the name of religion. Satan is “*a god of fortresses*” (Dan 11:38), and will tirelessly work to impose his self-exalted rule upon all men. By a multitude of religions, the devil “*deceive[s] the nations*” (Rev 20:3, Rev 20:8, Rev 20:10) and leads men away from simple faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Bible tells us that the cross of Christ is the only means of our soul's salvation. “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved*” (Act 16:31). Satan says, through religion, “trust in your ability to reform and improve yourself.”

For those who have entered the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, the devil's tactics remain the same. He orchestrates his false ministers (2Co 11:13–15; 2Pe 2:1–3) to proclaim a false gospel (2Co 11:3–4; Gal 1:8–9), to teach false doctrines (1Ti 1:4; 2Ti 3:5, 2Ti 4:3–4), all designed to lead the believer astray from the path of simple faith and obedience in God's Word. Once we know our enemy and are wise to his strategy, “*for we are not ignorant of his devices*” (2Co 2:11), we will be able to avoid deception and overcome his tactics. “*Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world*” (1Jo 4:4), and “*this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith*” (1Jo 5:4).

3. The Victory

The key to spiritual victory is given in two parts here in Ephesians 6. First, there is the putting on of the whole armor of God. This is accomplished by faith day-by-day. The lifestyle of discipleship is contained in the disciplines portrayed by the armor. As we trust God in each of these areas, we are “*walking by faith, and not by sight*” (2Co 5:7). In every decision and action, we are looking to our Father in Heaven for guidance and strength. We trust in His Word and rely on His indwelling Spirit for enabling power to do His will.

With the armor on, we come to the second phase of attaining the victory. So important is this final act that Paul stresses it four times from Eph 6:11–14. We are to “stand firm”! The word pictures the elite Roman veteran known as the *Triarii*. As battle-tested heroes, these men took their place in the line with the motto, “No surrender, no defeat.” They would claim the ground on which they stood against all odds. When the child of God, by simple faith, chooses to stand on the Word of God, regardless of the cost, he cannot help but win. No believer ever became a casualty through trial or temptation who met the foe in Matthew 4 with the battle-shout “*it is written*”!

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus withstood all the wiles of the devil, (Mat 4:1–11), giving to all who would follow Him the key to victory, “stand firm!” on the Word of God. In that crucial conflict, our matchless Lord—even though weak from exposure and hunger—faced down the enemy of men's souls and showed the way to victory. In His weakened state, Jesus displayed that victory comes not in our own strength, for the battle is “*not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts [armies]*” (Zec. 4:6). The devil shuddered each time Jesus

uttered those words he dreaded, *"it is written,"* and we read, *"then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him"* (Mat 4:11). In just the same way we are assured, *"therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"* (Jam 4:7). As long as you stand by faith on the Word of God, you will never *"give place to the devil"* (Eph 4:27), and you cannot lose in your personal arena of life!

Let us then determine to daily put on the full armor of God. As we cast aside all confidence in ourselves (Phi 3:3), and place our full trust in the grace of God, we will be enabled to take our place in the line of battle which God has allotted to us. As we *"stand firm,"* we will expand the borders of His Kingdom of Light, seeing souls *"delivered ... from the power of darkness and conveyed [transferred] us into the kingdom of His dear Son"* (Col 1:13). By faith alone we will conduct ourselves as *"good soldiers of Christ Jesus"* (2Ti 2:3), and *"fight the good fight"* (1Ti 1:18, 1Ti 6:12). And at the battle's end, we will stand before our Commander-in-Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ, and hear his commendation, *"well done."* It will be reward enough!