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**Armor**  
**Part 1 – Be Strong in the Lord**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're glad you're tuning in as we kick off this series called *Armor*. Today, we are going to introduce all six pieces of the armor that we are called to wear, as believers in Christ, as we enter into spiritual battle, spiritual warfare. We're going to unpack this all the way through October. Today is the introduction to the series and then the teaching team is going to take each piece of the armor and take a week for each piece. Today, we are jumping right in with Be Strong in the Lord.

I grew up in the 80s. Who grew up in the 80s, the greatest generation? Well, in the 80s, we hadn't heard of this term *political correctness* yet. We grew up in neighborhoods and in our neighborhood, we played war. Did anybody play war? Let me just see the hands. It was okay back then. Democrats and republicans came together to play war in the neighborhood, and we didn't draw lines between democrat and republican. I remember in our neighborhood, we played baseball, basketball, and war. We had one passivist family that lived up the street and every time we played war, the two kids had to go home. I don't even know if they've made it; I'm just being really honest with you. I should probably follow up on them.

I was thinking about it this week that I remember playing war. We didn't have gear so we just went and found anything we could with camouflage on it. Most of us just had headbands. We had one guy in our neighborhood, and I forgot his name so let's call him Bobbie. He started to get serious with this. I mean every time we would play, he would show up with more gear. And then we found out his parents were taking him to the Army Surplus store. We're in shorts and Chicago Cubs tee shirts and Evil Knievel tee shirts and Shasta tee shirts. He showed up one day... I mean not fake, not toys from KB Toys or Toys R Us. It was like the helmet from the Army Surplus, and the belt. I was just like, "Whoa! Hey! I'm on his team. We're going to win with him."

Then the next week... I'll never forget it. He showed up with a medic's bag and it was a medic's bag, no lie, that they used in Viet Nam. And when you got hurt, which we never got hurt playing war, but it was fake hurt. He would come over and wrap your arm in gauze bandages. He didn't become a joke in the neighborhood, but it was like, "Man, he's really taking this seriously. We should keep our eye on him." Then he started showing up... I'm not making any of this up. ... with real weapons. Okay, now this is when we have to tell our parents, "In case we don't come home by dark, you need to come out after us because Bobbie has real weapons."

I remember the day he showed up with his green belt across the chest and he had real grenades. They weren't toys. They were hollowed out, but they were real army grenades. I remember asking him, "Right? We're still pretending?"

I thought back on that story today. I think what we're talking about today, some people will take lightly and take it as pretend. But what we're talking about today is not to be taken lightly, follower of Jesus. It's something that we need to realize and that's we are at war. And everybody in here has a different battle going on right now. My prayer for each and every one of you as we get in the text today... Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6. We're going to look at Verses 10-20. My prayer is that at the end of whatever battle you're going through right now, you will still be standing. When we go through these verses today, I want you to circle every time you see the word *stand*. At the end of the battle, at the end of the day, I just want to stand.

In the 11:30 last week, a pastor friend of mine texted me saying, "Hey, the Deacons asked for my resignation this week. Can you give me a call today?" I called him on the way home from church. I said, "What's the very first thing you're feeling right now? I hate this for you and your family." He said, "I'm not going to lie to you, Ted. My very first response was immediate relief. I felt this huge burden lifted from my shoulders." He's like a lot of us. We're not experienced or trained to deal with the vaccines or the masks and all the debates that are hitting the church today. He goes, "I just felt immediate relief."

Here's what I told him. I don't do a word for the year thing, but I've ended up with a lot this year because a friend of mine posted and I thought it was good. He said, "In 2020, with the pandemic, we felt like we were running a marathon. And then at the end of 2020, when the marathon was over, someone handed us a bicycle and swim trunks." I don't think swim trunks; I think it's more like a Speedo, right? Because we went from a marathon to a triathlon. We got finished with the triathlon in the spring of 2021, we thought we were coming out of this, only to realize it wasn't a marathon, it wasn't a triathlon, we were in an iron man, and we were running.

This is all I told my friend and what I've been telling a lot of folks who are weary from the battle right now. It's a word that just comes to mind: **Faithfulness**. That you would be faithful. That you would not drift in your faith. That would not drift from your marriage, from your family. That at the end of the day, you are found faithful. But I also told my friend, and this is an important one for me: **soul care**. You have to be taking care of yourself. Trying to lead your family and to get your family to be healthy, you have to be healthy. To lead a church or an organization or a school, if you want that to be healthy, you have to be healthy.

But then, as we are going to see today, there's this idea of **readiness**. We need to be ready for the battle. I'm done with watching Christians caught off guard when the battle hits them. We shouldn't be surprised. This week is going to be an emotional week for a lot of you. I know it is for me because I will be watching a lot of the 9/11 documentaries. Twenty years ago, this week... Here's what you can get democrats and republican agreeing on. We were not ready that day. Every politician said that. Every leader said that. We were caught off guard. We all, in that first stage of grief, were living in shock and denial. We couldn't believe that would ever happen here. We weren't ready. The weeks that followed, you heard President Bush say it. Not only were we not ready, we didn't even really know where to find

the enemy. Why? Because the enemy is different than any other war we've ever fought. This is now a war on terror. They don't live in just one country; they are spread out, they're strategic. They plan. They have resources, and we have to figure this out so we can be ready. And 20 years later, you and I, every time we walk into an airport, we see the readiness of our nation. We walk through TSA.

I've been watching, over the last two weeks, like you have, many of the Pentagon Briefings. I've tried to find a picture with a happy general. They don't exist. I'm sure the generals exist, but the pictures don't exist because they are constantly looking at the press core with this look like, *don't be stupid; I can't answer that question*. Why can't you answer that question? Because some of the stuff we do in the military needs to be a secret. We can't announce to our enemy how we're coming, when we're coming, from what direction we're coming.

As I read Ephesians 6, I see Paul, who is imprisoned, he is in chains for the gospel, telling us to be ready. Be ready because we are at war. We're at war and every follower of Jesus... If you place faith in Christ Jesus, as we sang growing up in Sunday school, "I'm in the Lord's army." Hey, alright. Bible School Bob back there. Kent is a good friend. I told Kent he's the only church member I know that doesn't understand what a rhetorical question is. He answers every question I ever ask from up here.

You are in the Lord's army. I want to make sure we all know what that means. That means you are an enemy of Satan. And as an enemy of Satan, when you take your stand... You're going to hear that word a lot today in the text. As you take your stand in the Lord, you will be on Satan's radar. Stop trying to avoid his radar and take your stand strong in the Lord.

I want you to see Paul today. He's a prisoner writing this, but I almost see him as a general, telling us, "Boot up, and suit up." If you're new to our church you're like, *Okay, this is a fun, light Labor Day little talk right here*.

We need to start with Ephesians 6 **10 Finally...** Not by yourself, not in your mighty strength because you ain't got any. **...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** We start today understanding we do not fight our battles alone. You're not asked to go into battle alone. You are asked to go in suited up and booted up in the Lord's mighty power. And today, the armor that we look at is kind of like the fruit of the Spirit. You don't get to read love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, and self-control, and then pick which one you like and focus on it. That is the fruit of the Spirit. It's all-encompassing. When we look at the six pieces of armor, you don't get to pick the two or three that you want to wear; we're called to wear it all as we stand in battle.

One pastor put it this way, "As we talk about our battles within the invisible war that we are fighting, this war between good and evil, light and dark, between God and Satan." Spiritual warfare is about God's people joining their Lord in his warfare as we have been singing about this morning.

**11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.** The devil's strategies, his tricks. And if you are a follower of Jesus, your enemy has a plan to take you down. He hates you. He wants you destroyed. He wants your marriage destroyed. He wants your family destroyed. He wants to take you out. And he's got schemes and strategies and plans to do that.

Let's talk about that for just a moment. Let's start with **Satan is real**. He is not a Halloween costume. He's not some guy in red pajamas with a pitch fork and horns. We have all these images. Even our sports teams like to make him cute so they can have him as a mascot. Let's walk through quickly, going all the way back to the beginning in Genesis 3 – **Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made**. God told Adam and Eve, "You don't eat from that tree, or you will die." And what did Satan say? He denied the Word of God outright. We're going to see this quite a bit today. He denied the word of God outright. 1) **"You will not certainly die..."** And not only that, 2) **when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and 3) you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**"

Understand he's been passing this strategy off forever, for years, and in your life and in my life. He wants you to believe God said it, but guess what? It's not really the truth. "And you know what? Outside of the scripture, you can find your own truth. Some things will happen to you in your life and let's just go ahead and declare that as truth." What is he ultimately doing? He's setting you up to be the God of your life. He's been doing this to God's people from the beginning. He hates God's people. He's been strategizing against them since the beginning.

We read in 1 Chronicles 21: 1, **Satan rose up against Israel...** He has always hated God's people, he still hates God's people. **...and incited David to take a census of Israel**, which he was told not to do.

In Matthew 4: 3, we read that Satan is the great tempter. He came to Jesus and said, **"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** But here's what we know. Satan is not more powerful than God. God is omnipresent, everywhere at all times. Satan is not. Satan is not omnipotent. He is not all powerful. Satan needs an army to put these evil schemes out there. His schemes, his strategies, his tricks come to us through his army of demons. That's why in Matthew 12: 24 we read he is the prince of his army, the demons. This is why we need to be clear, and we're going to jump into this more next week.

And then when we get into the sixth piece of this armor in 1 Timothy 4:1 we read the spirit clearly says that in latter times, which, make no mistake, we are in, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. My prayer as your pastor... Because I see it all the time. We have so many teachers, so many leaders in ministries in this church working with people who have been dupped by doctrines of demons. This is why we get passionate about it. This is why the teaching team is fully supported and encourage to speak the truth and speak it boldly. That's because, make no mistake, when someone is up here declaring the Word of God, we are going against things taught by demons. What we are doing today is warfare. This is a battle. Your like, *Well, just tell a joke then and we'll lighten it up*. My personality can take me to the humor side, but let's be very clear. 2 Corinthians 4: 4 says he has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

And there are many in here right now, there are many outside, there are many watching online, you are not a follower of Jesus and you have so many different opinions just in the last year and a half your worldview is a doctrine of demons. You've been taught falsely. You picked things up over the years. And if you're not a follower of Jesus, you're like, "What side would I be on?" The scripture says in John 8: 44, if you're not a follower of Jesus, you are of your father the devil. You're of your father the devil. A murderer from the beginning, a liar and the father of all lies. If you've not placed faith in Jesus, if you've

not trusted Christ as your savior, you do not believe that Jesus died and rose again, you are of your father the devil and a child of darkness. You are pawn of Satan. But through faith in Christ, you can be in the Lord's army. Faith alone in Christ alone. You become a child of God.

This week, I kept picturing putting on the armor of God as a child of God. Remember how we used to help our kids get dressed in the morning? I kind of view this armor like God helping me as his child get dressed like, "You're not going out of the house looking like that, Ted. We don't let you wear boots and shorts. Those don't go together. Long pants go with boots. Shorts go with tennis shoes." Remember we, as parents, always had to help our kids work through this stuff?

Today, with this armor, put on the full armor of God as your heavenly father. If you've placed faith in Jesus, your heavenly Father is saying, "I gotta prepare you for what awaits you as you step out, as you step onto the battlefield." Remember what Satan is doing. We're still on his evil schemes, his strategies, his tricks. He's leading the whole world astray. Christians, can we stop being dupped. By being dupped, I mean can we stop being surprised when we see the world being led astray? We have the answers. We know the truth. We don't push them arrogantly, we speak the truth in love. But we see the world going astray.

You'll hear a preacher say things like, "I've read the end of the book and we win." Let me tell you. Satan's days are numbered. Revelation 20: 10 says, ***10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.***

Let's be very clear. Satan hates you, your marriage, your family, this church, and will stop at nothing to take us out. But Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

I say this at weddings all the time. Jesus is your source, Satan is your enemy, your spouse is not your source or your enemy. Know clearly who your source is today and who your enemy is.

John 10:10 says, ***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

This week, I called and had a long conversation with my friend Alex Himaya. He just one of those brothers that is nothing but encouragement. We can vent with each other. I'd love for you to hear some of the conversations. You couldn't because you'd be asking for our resignations. Every body needs a pastor you can talk to.

Alex said this and I said run with that for a little while. "Man, isn't Satan brilliant? We've seen his brilliance over the last year and a half. The duplicity of his warfare, it's amazing."

We read in 1 Peter 5, ***8 Be alert and of sober mind.*** Alert is another word for readiness. Be ready because... ***Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*** He's coming after you. He's coming after your family.

Ephesians 6 says, **12 For our struggle is not against** (your spouse) **flesh and blood**. Your spouse is not the enemy. Your boss is not the enemy. **...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**. So, everything in the spiritual realm is not good. It can be spiritual and evil. Some of you, right now, see the chaos in the world, you see all the craziness going on, and you ask, "Who's to blame for this?" Some of you are like, "It's the democrats! They are to blame for all of this." "It's the republicans. They are to blame for all of this." "It's the passivists. They are to blame for all of this." Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Know what's going on. Alex and I both got all worked up on this and we spent 30 minutes talking about this right here:

**Satan uses people who don't know they are being used.** And you know what? I've made the declaration out of that phone call because after a week... I'll tell you the story in a second, I just said... I remember the prayer clearly out of that call. I refuse to be a pawn of Satan's. I refuse. And that's why we're getting to this armor.

Two weeks ago, I spoke at Focus on the Family Chapel. I love my partnership with this ministry. I feel called to marriage and family. I know that when you do stuff for focus, it goes out on a broadcast. It has a wide reach. I was so convicted, I was so mad, I was so frustrated over something I did. It wasn't something I said; it was something I didn't say. I withheld making the statement that I make everywhere and all the time. You've heard me say it I don't know how many times. I withheld it because I didn't want to deal with it when it hits the broadcast. They asked me to speak on the Imago Dei, the image of God in man, and how we honor all human beings as created in the image of God. It means they are autographed by God, they have automatic, intrinsic value. I read from Genesis 1: 27 and how Jesus quotes it in Matthew 19 and Paul in Ephesians 5 right before the text that we're in.

When I get to the male and female, he created them, I always say this line, "I am one dad who is raising my son to embrace his biological sex and marry the opposite sex. I am one dad who is raising my daughter to embrace her biological sex and marry the opposite sex." I can confess to you I withheld that statement because I didn't want to deal with it when it hit the broadcast. I didn't want to deal with the phone calls into the office calling me homophobic. I didn't want to deal with emails and tweets calling me outdated, homophobic, bigot, misogynist.

We go to lunch, and I go with two friends from Focus, and they could see it on me. I was mad, not at anybody but me. They asked me what was going on. I go, "Man, I am a chicken! An absolute chicken!" Here's the thing. If I had never told you this, you wouldn't know and you wouldn't care. You wouldn't have heard it and you wouldn't have seen it missed in the deal. The whole way home on a Frontier flight into Branson, Missouri, I'm repenting to my Father in heaven... because this is a big deal. This is part of Satan's schemes. This is how Satan is brilliant. Satan makes it unloving and unkind to attack him. And that's why some of you aren't opening your mouths anymore. You don't want to be called judgmental. You don't want to be called a bigot. You don't want to be called a misogynist. I'm here to tell you that by the time I got off that plane at the Branson Airport... I don't know what it is about the airport there, but I walked out with, "Never again. Everywhere I go, Lord, and whatever it costs me, I'm saying it. And I ain't backing down a bit." Let's see what Twitter says really quick.

Some of you are falling for the Twitter scheme, the Facebook scheme, the social media scheme and you're withholding. Now, let me be very careful to my republican friends in the room. You're like, "Unleashed! I am going unhinged and unleashed on social media today!" You're missing the whole point of this. For my angry little soldier friends in the room, you need to bring it down a notch. I still want to speak the truth in love. But I want to speak the truth. Satan has made it... It's brilliant. "If I can't destroy their marriage... If I can't destroy Ted's marriage, if I can't destroy his family, I'll destroy his ministry." There are people out there right now going after marriage and family speakers, getting their Twitter army calling the churches where we're going saying, "Don't have this guy in because of this or that or the other."

I had this moment where I was praying, "Lord, I'm trying to protect things. I'm trying to protect our church." And he's like, "Oh, it's all yours now? That's fantastic, Ted. I can take it away in a moment. I can remove you in a moment. You want to stop being my mouthpiece? Okay?" It was this moment... There is a lot of stuff I don't speak on, but marriage and family is one thing I do speak on. And I know God has called me to speak on it.

We went back to the debrief after 8:30 and several people said, "You need more practical examples like this of the devil's schemes. And I'm going to tell you we are going to get them in the next six weeks.

We have to move on. **13 Therefore put on the full armor of God...** Ted, you chicken. **...so that when the day of evil comes...** Now I want you to circle the number of times you see this. It's not the word win, it's the word *stand*. At the end of the battle, I still want to be standing. I'm not going to go silent to protect myself. There are plenty of things... You're like, "This feels more like counseling than a sermon. He's working some things out right now." **...you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** Just keep circling stand. Stand, be faithful, be ready, stay engaged in the battle.

**14 Stand firm then...** We're going to unpack these, so this is just an introduction into the armor. **...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.** And they are coming at you. Don't go hide in your house, just be ready for the battle. **17 Take the helmet of salvation...** Now, those first five, they are all defensive parts of the armor. This is the only offensive part. **...and the sword of the Spirit...** This is offense. **...which is the word of God.**

Let's break these down quickly. Again, this is just an introduction. Next week, we'll jump into the belt of truth. One and six can be confusing for people. Six speaks of the Word of God, but not even just the Bible in general, but a word spoken from scripture that's prompted by the Holy Spirit.

But the **Belt of Truth** here is kind of like when we read the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus... We did the parable a few months ago. Build your life upon the rock, not on the sand, so when the winds and waves and all of that hit you, you're ready to go. You're building your life on the truth, the rock, Christ Jesus.

**This is speaking of our integrity, our honesty, our truthfulness with ourselves and with others.** If we have any CrossFit people in here, any weightlifters in here, you know they put on that belt and they cinch it up and it's all about the core. All the other pieces are going to hang on that, but this is what needs to be the first piece.

Why do we have the armor pictured like this? Remember Paul is in prison, chained to a Roman centurion or a Roman soldier, and he's wanting to talk to Christians after speaking in the central passage of the New Testament on marriage and family. He's preparing the marriages and families for spiritual warfare. He sees this soldier and says, "I could use this as the illustration, as the word picture to teach Christians how to stand in battle and how to be ready in battle. And the pieces come to us typically how it would have been put on, a piece at a time. And it started with the belt. You can't have your life segmented, "I got my church life over there and my family life over there and my work like over there and my gambling addiction over there, my pornography addiction over there. Everything is just separate. No, this is speaking of it's all one in the same. We live one life and it's a life of integrity. Speaking the truth at all times. To ourselves and to each other.

**The breastplate of righteousness**, which would wrap around the entire body. This is what's keeping those arrows off. This is what I believe, right? The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness. Now, I'm going to live what I say I believe. My orthopraxy is going to match my orthodoxy. **Sanctifying, righteous living, and deeds of a believer.** Remember that righteous living and deeds of a believer is not what brings us salvation. You are saved through faith alone in Christ alone. We'll see that in a moment with another piece. But this is actually desiring to live out... It's one way I stand. You've seen it. When someone loses the character battle, they lose credibility. When your character is attacked even... And your character can be attacked. You feel with more... We stand up with the belt of truth, with acts of righteousness, we're living out what we say we believe.

**Feet fitted with readiness.** We are standing on defending and spreading the gospel. This brings peace. Jesus died and rose again for me.

**The shield of faith.** This is what I would go into battle with. It's the believer call and resolve in the Lord, not in my strength. It's knowing that God will do what he says he will do. I can rest in his promises.

**The helmet of salvation.** I like this. The believer's safety and stature. One commentary I read this week said when a soldier would put on his helmet... Maybe you remember seeing this in Gladiator. There's something about having all the armor on, but when the helmet went on it did something with the stature. He said when the Roman soldier put on their helmet, you were impressed. He said this is the child of God putting on the helmet, not for you to be impressed with me and not for you to think about me with my stature, but what it reminds me of is that I am safe under the finished work of Christ as I go into battle.

**The sword of the Spirit.** It's the Word of God, but it's not just the Bible in general. It's the Word of God prompted by the Holy Spirit and spoken in a specific situation. The only way that works is if you know your Bible. Know your Bible. Memorize, meditate on passages so that when you find yourself in the battle, the Holy Spirit will call it to mind. That's why when I sat down at that lunch after Focus Chapel,



I'm sitting there going *I know better*. All of these passages just keep coming to my mind. That's the Holy Spirit prompting the Word of God in your life at the moment that you need it. This is important. You notice we saw the word *stand*. We didn't see the word *win*. Why? Because we fight our battles from victory not for victory. We need to start walking in that.

Just to close, This is an awkward close for me, so just give me a moment. In Verse 18-20, we read that prayer is essential for effectiveness of all of this armor; it's key. I want you to see Verses 18-20. I don't ever ask for this and it just outside of my comfort zone to ask for it. I need to sit in it. You need to sit in it. We all need to sit in it.

***18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind... I just hope we see this readiness for it everywhere. ...be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*** Pray for your family, pray for your marriage. Divorce is a battle, but your spouse is not the enemy. Your ex-spouse is not the enemy. Know what's going on. Pray for your children. You want to send your children out to get great education, that's great, but make sure they are suited and booted as they head onto the battlefield. And that they get this. This is the part that I ask from you because Paul says it. He says, ***19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak... I'm preparing this message while chickening out. ...words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

First of all, I'm going to say thank you for your support of the teaching team all these years. But I'm going to tell you something. I hope I don't ever hear it again because I hope I hear what I'm about to ask you to do from here on out. "Oh, I like this member of the team" or "I like this guy..." Every single person that stands up here and fearlessly proclaims the Word of God needs your prayer, 100%. This is battle. So, I'm just going to encourage you instead of picking your favorites, pray for all. Every time the Bible is opened up here, every time the Word of God goes out, we should be doing it fearlessly. I just love how Verse 20 ends here with "...as I should." I'm going to pray that for you as well for you and your family, that you'll declare the truth to children who don't want to hear it, to family members that don't want to hear it. That you will do it in a posture where you are suited and booted and prepared. You are not fighting for victory, but you are fighting from victory in the Lord's army.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that I am grateful for this church, I'm grateful for how you continue to use Woodland Hills in this community. We're on Satan's radar and we should never take that lightly. We should never be shocked by that, but we should boldly proclaim, continue to proclaim the gospel and the good news of Jesus in this community and out over livestream and Facebook today. That we would respond with gentleness, kindness, compassion to those who are being taught things by demons.

For those who are being duped, being played by demons, for those who are pawns for demons, that today would be the day of salvation for many who have been living life for themselves, defined by themselves, and for themselves, declaring their own truth, that today they would repent of their sins, place faith alone in Christ alone, believe that Jesus died and rose again for them. That they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and today would be the day of their salvation.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.