

The Christian Life Is a Process

by Michael Catt

The Christian life is a process of growth and development that requires effort and commitment, but ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of God's presence and power in our lives.

Duration: 1:01:31

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:1-2, Romans 6:15, 2 Corinthians 2:11, Ephesians 6:16, Colossians 2:14

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not just having knowledge and experiences in the Christian faith, but actually using them to make a difference for God. He warns against the dangers of legalism and being consumed with feelings and emotions. The preacher uses the analogy of marines taking an island to illustrate the process of the Christian life. He explains that while God is working in us, we also need to actively go out and take ground for God, not just staying in our comfort zones. The sermon is based on Romans chapter 6 and highlights the idea that the Christian life is a continuous process of growth and transformation.

Transcript

...what we're supposed to be about, and I don't know if you've ever sung better. You may have, but tonight you did as good as I've ever heard you do, and I appreciate you for sharing this. Well, if you didn't have any other reason to come to church tonight, that would have been it right there.

Romans chapter 6, Romans chapter 6 and verse 1, the title of the series that we're in is In Jesus' Name We Press On. Kind of nice that somebody wrote a song with that title. And I want to talk tonight about the Christian life being a process.

It begins with an event, but it continues with a process. Romans 6 and verse 1, you know the history behind Romans 6, 7 and 8. There's a battle. There's a struggle.

Paul says, I do things I don't want to do, and I don't do things I should do, and what's going on? This wrestling match that's going on inside of our lives. We make progress. We have three steps forward and take two steps back, and what's going on with all of that? So Paul writes to the Romans and says, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? The Greek word in verse 2 is meganoito, and it means never.

May it never be sounds light and soft. I remember my New Testament professor in college said that Paul was shaking his fist and shaking his head and just as emphatically as he could, he was saying, never should we live like that. He was trying to get every point across that he could in this word.

There's such power and authority behind this word. He says, never shall it be that way. How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into his death? Now I want you to look at how he takes what God has done with sin and for us and relates it to the resurrection.

First, he says, we've been baptized into his death. Then he says, therefore, we have been buried with him through baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection.

In other words, everything that God did for Christ, he's doing for us. He's given us the same power. He has given us the same power in our lives.

He says, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him in order that our body of sin might be done away with so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. I have been looking on Christian bookstore shelves and in music and in seminars and conferences all my life for a quick and easy way to be spiritual.

I've got more how-to books on how to be spiritual than I can count, and not one of them makes me spiritual. I want God to just come down and do one of those 30-minute infomercials with testimonies. I lost 183 pounds in five days, and now I have rock-solid abs.

I just want to kind of sit here and buy osmosis or a pill or some kind of magic formula. All of a sudden, I'm transformed into godliness. Somehow I bought the lie early in my life that I could get retail blessings at wholesale prices, that somehow that I didn't have to pay a price.

That I could have the power of God and the authority of God and the blessings of God on my life and in and through my life without paying a price. You know, that's what happened with the children of Israel. They wanted to go from Egypt into the promised land, but they didn't want to fight for it.

And so for 40 years, they wandered in the wilderness because they weren't willing to fight for what God had for them. You know, God will give you something, but sometimes you have to fight for what he's given you. Paul is saying, we're in a struggle here with sin.

And overcoming sin is a choice, but it's a deliberate act too. I have to choose to stand on the authority of what God's given me in Jesus Christ. I have to choose to stand in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the problem with Israel is like the problem with many Christians. We want it. We want victory and we want power and we want all that God has for us, but we don't want to pay the price to get it.

And so we come to these moments in our lives and we quite honestly ask the question, why is it taking me so long to become spiritual? How come it takes me so long to get better? Why can't God just zap me with something and just get it all over with? Why can't I wake up one day with no desire to sin and no desire to even think about sin and temptation just rolls off of me like water on a duck's back? Why can't God just do that for me just instantaneously? Wouldn't I be a better servant for him if he did that? And the reality is that

in many of our lives, failure is more descriptive than victory of us. And we stumble and we fall and we're running on all cylinders and I mean we're just going 90 to nothing and we're just beating the bushes down and we're taking off and then all of a sudden we blow a gasket. You know, we're walking in victory and we're walking in power and God's answering our prayer and all of a sudden it seems like the bottom falls out and one area of our life gets right and another area comes undone.

We just don't know what to do. Why is it like this? Why do we always struggle? Paul said that all things have become new and I look at my life sometimes and say, well, that's become new and that's become new and that's become new but I think I got retreads over here on this one. I'm not sure I got all of this when I was supposed to get it.

And we battle and we struggle with these inconsistencies and inequities in our lives. Why is it like that? Why doesn't God just do something to change all of that? The bottom line we begin to ask ourselves, why do I have a divided mind? Why do I battle with these same old temptations and sins and why is it hard for me to love unlovely people and why is it so difficult for me to walk in victory on a daily basis? I feel so high up when I'm here on Sunday and I hear a song by the choir and it blesses me and it encourages me and then by Monday afternoon I'm wondering if I'm even saved. Why do those things happen to us? Well I want to expand on a brief illustration that I gave you a number of weeks ago and I want to talk about three things tonight.

First of all is the beachhead. I think the driving question for anybody that's seeking after God is, so how long before I'm mature? How long before I'm spiritual? And I want to take this illustration and I want to expand it out and then I want us to apply it to our own lives. In World War II in the Pacific when we were battling to win the Pacific and we were fighting a war on two fronts, in the Atlantic and in the Pacific.

When we were fighting those battles the military began realizing that we had to conquer one island at a time. And so after the devastating defeat at Pearl Harbor and after a narrow victory at Midway we began to mechanically and just plotting out which island is next, which one is next, which one is next, MacArthur's famous statement, I shall return. And so during the next several months the United States military began to photograph every island in the Pacific to see where it stood strategically.

They would look at the fortifications on the island. They would try to determine, this was before satellites, they would try to determine what the enemy's strength was, what their supply was, what their fortifications were, and if that island was strategic in the scheme of winning the war in the Pacific. If it was strategic they had to develop a battle strategy.

If it wasn't they would just bypass it and go around it. But if that island needed to be taken it was not taken immediately. It was softened up.

The naval vessels would come in and with those large guns on those battleships they would bombard and mercilessly just bomb after bomb and shell after shell bombard the island and then the planes would come in and bomb it and the beaches would be strafed all to soften up the island so that the Marines could land on the island with as few casualties as possible. In fact when they began this process they would target various areas and sides of the island so that the enemy would not know exactly where the troops were going to land because of the bombardment, because of the strafing, because of all the photography work that had been done. They knew that America was coming but they didn't know where or when.

And so that they would go on this end of the island and that end on this side and on the back side, wherever they would go, they would go all over the island so that there was no actual indication as to the point of invasion. The point of it all was that at some point the order would be given and the Marines would get off of those ships and they would embark and they would take a beach. They would take a beachhead and at the appointed hour when those Marines landed, the minute they would get there and dig in right at the edge of the water, they would radio back to the naval vessels and they would say, "The island is secure."

We have taken the beachhead. Or they would say, "The situation is well in hand." Now this was after a softening up process and although they only held that small little section of beach and it was only a few thousand Marines, history tells us that once we began the process of retaking the islands in the Pacific, the Marines were never pushed off a beach and back into the water. When we went in, we took the island. It may have been at great cost.

It may have been at a high price. It may have been longer on some than others. But once we went in and took the island and took that beachhead, we were there to stay.

And it was at that point that the island was secure. We were beginning to take ground and then the heavy artillery and the tanks and the equipment and the reinforcements could come in and once that was secure, then we went on the offensive. You see, the island was softened up and they would say, "The island is secure." But all the island wasn't taken yet.

Although they had this narrow beachhead and let's just say the front of this platform is the beachhead. Although the Marines were entrenched along this narrow front, there was this big island that needed to be taken and yet it was secure in their eyes. You know what God had to do with each of us? God set His heart on us one day but sin had blinded us and the devil had blinded us and evil had blinded us and our fallen nature was running and ruling our lives and so one day God began to bombard us.

You know, we went somewhere in a restaurant and somebody was talking about Jesus and we heard His name and it just kind of got us a little bit. Maybe we were in the hospital and somebody came by and prayed for us and He softened us up that way. Maybe in a financial setback, God began to soften us up and we realized we weren't in control of our lives but somehow, somehow in every one of our lives, it might have been in a Sunday school class, it may have been in a crisis, it may have been in a setback but in some way, somehow in every one of our lives, you didn't just decide to get saved.

God bombarded you. He developed a strategy for you. He knew where you were entrenched and what it would take to get your attention and so He began to work on you just like the marines and the military would work on the island, He began to work on you and He would start lobbing shells on the shores of your life and He began to soften you up.

And one day, you asked Christ into your life and the Holy Spirit took a beachhead in your life. Now, He got in right here. It may have been when you were nine or ninety but the Holy Spirit got in.

But there were still parts of your life that He needed to get control of, weren't there? I mean, just because you walked down and got saved and gave your heart to Jesus didn't mean that you had resolved all the conflicts in your life and all the issues in your life. It meant that you were forgiven but there was still some resistance. There were still some areas where God needed to work on you but God softened you up and you came to Him and you realized, "I am in over my head and I need somebody to help me." And you

came to Christ because Christ first came to you.

And through the power of the Holy Spirit and people, He worked on you until He got you soft enough that you were willing to hear and respond to the Gospel. Lane Adams says this way, it is only when we are secure in the knowledge that our position is perfect in the sight of God that we have the courage to either face up to or admit that our condition is miserable. The work of Jesus Christ was achieving that position for us sinners and the work of the Holy Spirit is to remedy our lousy condition. Now you see, when God softened me up and when I got saved, I surrendered my life to Christ but He didn't have all of me at that point.

That's a process. There's the event of the Holy Spirit coming into my life. But there's the process that will continue until the day I die of Him continuing to soften me up, continuing to take ground, continuing to move forth in my life.

The problem is not that I need more of God. I've got all of God I need. The Holy Spirit didn't come into me in degrees.

When the Holy Spirit came, He came to take up residence in my life. The problem is not that I need more of the Holy Spirit. The problem is the Holy Spirit needs more of me.

You see, the issue in my life is not God's inadequacy, it's my resistance. God's adequate for every need and every problem and every sin and every temptation that I deal with. But I might resist Him and one of the snares of the devil in a time of revival is He makes us, those of us that have been saved for a while, expect more of new Christians than we even expect of ourselves.

I remember Howard Hendricks who used to be the chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys, he had a powerful witness with the Cowboys when Tom Landry was coach there, now I'm not sure Jesus can get into the Dallas Cowboys, but anyway, he took a preacher out for one of the practices. He said, I got this guy as a linebacker. He said, I led him to the Lord about six months ago, and he said, I want you to meet him. I want him to meet you. You know, he's a great guy. I mean, God just gloriously saved him.

And so he said, I took him out there, and he said, this guy missed a tackle, and then he missed another tackle, and he missed another tackle, and then he said a cuss word. And he said, the preacher turned to him and said, I thought you said this guy was saved. He said, Man, you should have heard the way he cussed six months ago. He said, This is mild compared to where he was. And see, sometimes somebody gets saved and we expect them to be up here, but we still want to excuse that we're down here, don't we? This way means yes, don't we? I mean, we say, Oh, they shouldn't do that, they're a Christian. Okay, be careful that you don't expect something of someone else that those of us that have been saved a while, God should be able to expect of us, and the devil will get us to start looking at other people instead of looking at ourselves. But the Lord takes a beachhead, and when he gets a beachhead, he digs in, and he is bound by his nature to conform us to the image of Christ.

I mean, that's just what he's going to do. If you're saved, I got news for you, he's not going away. And by the way, when it says the island is secure, that's a great illustration of eternal security, because what it says is when the Holy Spirit comes, he digs in, and he's not moving out regardless of how you feel for what you do.

He is intent on taking over the island called your life. So there is the beachhead. Then let us look at the breakthrough.

Once these marines were dug in, they would receive reinforcements and equipment, and the sea bees would come in, and they would start to build roads, and they would start to build buildings, and sometimes the enemy would counterattack. I mean, the Japanese didn't just roll over and play dead. They would counterattack.

But these counterattacks—now listen to me very carefully. The counterattacks were not counterproductive, because what the counterattacks revealed was where the enemy was and what their strength level was. And so as they would move in from the beachhead to the breakthrough, and they would begin to push off of that beach and into the jungle, they would begin to have a beachhead, then there would be a buildup, and then there would be a breakthrough.

That is a threefold process. And God in our lives makes a beachhead into our lives, and then He builds up. He does that by encouraging us with other saints around us.

He does that by getting us in the Word of God. He does that by getting us to understand the role of prayer in our lives, and He builds us up, and then there comes a breakthrough. I mean, there may come a point in your life—and if you ever read the book *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* or the book *They Found the Secret*, you will find that every one of those people had another experience in their life that was almost equal to their salvation.

Not that they got the Holy Spirit, but God got a breakthrough in their life. It went from just, *I'm saved, and I'm happy, and I'm going to heaven,* to, *I'm all for Jesus.* There was usually a crisis. There was a counterattack of the enemy.

He came after them, and then they, in their desperation, cried out for God, and God took them to a whole new level of living. And that is what God does with us. The Holy Spirit secures a beachhead in our life, and He builds up, and He surrounds us, and then He tells us, *Now, you start moving out.*

Let us go. Let us get going, me and you together. Let us get moving.

Let us start taking some ground in your life. And all of a sudden, the enemy attacks, and you think, *Oh, no. The enemy is attacking. I thought I was saved.*

I thought the Spirit loved me. I thought Jesus was with me. But the counterattack reveals where the enemy is. Now, listen.

The devil doesn't have many tricks. He is used the same one since the garden. Adam said, *I saw, I coveted, I took.* David said, *I saw, I coveted, I took.* Achan said, *I saw, I coveted, I took.* Jesus talked about the lust of the devil.

He talked about lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life, the three temptations of Jesus. The devil always works in a predictable pattern. He is so stupid that after thousands of years, he can't come up with a new method.

And so that is why Paul says, *We are not ignorant of his devices.* Read your Bible, and you know where the devil is going to come after you. You know where he is going to attack. Now, you don't know when, and

you don't know what the strength of that attack is going to be, but you do know where it's going to come.

It's going to come in a predictable way in your life. But God will use that to give you a breakthrough. Quite honestly, there are a lot of Christians, they just want to sit on the beach, get a little suntan oil, you know, just enjoy Jesus, just chill out with Christ, happy hour with the Holy Spirit.

That's all they want. But if you're going to go further with God and move on in your want with God, you have to let the Holy Spirit push you in. Leighton Ford said this, 'It would seem that the church only prepares to move out after it's been run over from behind.' That's a powerful statement.

And sometimes the only reason we move out is when God just pushes us. You know that from raising children. There just comes a time when you just got to, 'Come on, let's go,' you know, because if left to themselves, your child will just sit there just forever and let you feed them.

Sit in that chair, suck their thumb, thirty years old, 'Mommy, can I have some oatmeal?' I mean, no child gets up one day and says, 'I'd like to be potty trained. I would like to learn how to make up my own bed. I would like to learn how to get myself up without you telling me I need to get up.' You have to teach them that.

Why? You have to push them. You have to push them so that they mature, so that they grow up, so that they move out in their faith. And so there's this breakthrough that comes, but remember now that the Japanese were masters at concealment.

There were snipers in the trees, and so they would send out men that would just kind of feel out the situation, and their lives were in danger. But the enemy conceals, and that's what the devil does, the enemy loves to conceal himself. And you'll be walking along, and all of a sudden you're off the beach, and you're saying, 'Man, I'm making headway.' I mean, 'I'm making headway, I'm going here, this is great.'

I love it, the Christian life is incredible. And all of a sudden, pew, boy, somebody just shoots at you and you go, 'Whoa, where did that come from?' You see, you'd have never known that sniper and that enemy was there until you got further in. Now, by the way, here's the principle of taking an island. When you're going to Keith, you and Stephen come here.

Now, you've got to follow my instructions, okay? Here, get your guns out. It's a pretty bad gun. Okay? Now, here's the deal, all right? Now, watch me.

Marines help me here. Those of you that have fought, help me here. When I'm going in and taking the island, they're also going out.

So I'm going in with God, but I'm also going out at the same time. You understand? So while I'm doing this, they're a whole group, and they're moving out, and they're taking this end, and they're taking that end, and they're capturing—we're not just going in single file down the middle of the island while all the rest of the island stays under the enemy's control. No, no, no, no, no, uh-uh.

No. They're moving out, and they're finding enemies over there. And we don't know that they're there, but they're there, and then when we get there, they start shooting at us, and we start saying, 'Whoa! Don't shoot Shirley.' She said 'Amen' this morning.

‘Don’t shoot her.’ I got some people you can shoot, but don’t shoot her. Now, do you see what God does? God sends you in deeper with Him, but at the same time, you’re spreading out. And as you’re going in deeper, and as you’re spreading out with Him, you’re discovering pockets of resistance in your life that at the time, you didn’t even know were there.

God wasn’t ready to reveal that to you yet. And you see, something that was acceptable to you here on the beach, all of a sudden, you get down there, and you start moving out here, and the Lord starts saying, ‘You know what? I think you need to change that in your life. I think you need to give that up.

I think you need to re-evaluate this part of your life.’ And you say, ‘Well, Lord, but I thought I was under the Lordship of Christ. I thought I’d surrendered everything.’ You surrendered all you knew to surrender. That’s all it was.

It wasn’t that you weren’t sincere. It wasn’t that you didn’t surrender. You surrendered all that you knew at the moment to surrender.

That’s why every day, you have to die to self, and every day, you have to surrender to the Lordship of Christ, because until God shows it to you, you may not even know it’s there. That may be easy for you to say, ‘Well, I know what His problem is, but I’m talking about you.’ You see, when you move in, God begins to show you, and when He has trained you and equipped you and built you up enough, then He can say, ‘Now, let’s talk about this over here.’ ‘Well, Lord, I didn’t know that was a problem.’ Well, you weren’t ready for me to show you that it was a problem. But now that you’re a little more mature, now that you’re ready, I need to show you that that’s a problem in your life.

And so, folks, don’t be surprised when you’re moving forward with God that every now and then the enemy doesn’t try to have a sniper work on you and to knock you off balance and to take you out, because there’s something in your life, there’s an area where you’re vulnerable, where you’re open to attack, and God has to reveal it to you so that you can see that I need to daily depend on Him, and I need His eyes and His mind and His heart, because if I don’t, I’m going to get shot down, and I’m going to be a casualty of war. The reason a lot of Christians fall out of the Christian life is not because they weren’t sincere, it’s because they kept marching out and they thought, ‘Nothing, I’m invincible, nothing’s going to get to me, I’ll never do that.’ And all of a sudden the enemy sets up a sniper, and they buckle, and then they say, ‘Oh, I must not have been saved,’ or they just quit. Now to have a spiritual breakthrough, you can’t settle for shortcuts.

Let me give you three quick shortcuts that we can make. Number one is the shortcut of legalism. When you’re trying to take an island, you follow orders, but you’d better be ready to improvise, because it may be that the person giving orders is not in the situation you’re in, and you’ve got to do what’s best at the moment as best you understand it.

And the Christian life is not dotting all the i’s and crossing all the t’s and not doing this and not doing that. The Christian life is a relationship with God, lived in daily dependence, it’s not legalism. Secondly, it’s not the shortcut of education.

You can be an expert on doctrine, you can be an expert on prophecy, but God’s not just trying to fill your mind with facts, He’s trying to fill your heart with Jesus. You see, it’s head and heart together. You may know apologetics, but if you don’t share it, it’s not doing you any good.

You may know what the third beast looks like and what the fourth toe on the fifth horseman looks like, but if you're not doing anything with it, it's no good to you. You see, the purpose of going in is to take ground for God, not to just pump yourself up. The shortcut of legalism, the shortcut of knowledge and education, and the shortcut of experience.

And that's where we become dangerous because we are an experience, feeling-oriented society. We want experiences, we want feelings, we want emotions, and we're consumed with experiences and we want to feel good. But you know what, a drug dealer feels good when he makes a sale, and a drug user feels good when they take it, and a gang member feels good when they live out the rules of the gang.

Experience doesn't mean anything. Feelings in the Christian life are a byproduct, they're not the product. If you're living for feelings, you're going to get off the island and quit.

Feelings are a byproduct, and you can't confirm anything in your life by feelings. Let your feelings follow your behavior, don't expect your behavior to follow your feelings. I might need to say that one again.

Let your feelings follow your behavior, don't let your behavior follow your feelings. So there's a breakthrough, and all of a sudden you realize that God has empowered you and God has equipped you, and God has given you everything that you need in Christ Jesus to live the life, and I mean the light bulbs come on and you realize that the Holy Spirit is not just there to get you into heaven, He's there to help you to walk in victory, and you think, "Man, this is great, I didn't know it could be like this, this is wonderful," and then there's a third thing, that's the battle. Because once you realize it, Satan will turn everything he can on you in one desperate attempt to try to knock you off balance, knock you off of your faith, drive you in frustration away from the family of God, keep you from living the life, he will come after you full force.

And in every one of our lives, there's a moment or there's a season when God allows the devil to come after us. It happened with Job, it happened with Simon Peter, Jesus said, "Peter, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat, but I pray for you that when you come through it, you'll encourage your brothers." You know what, Satan said, "I'd like to sift Simon Peter to see what he's made out of," and God gave him permission. By the way, nothing ever comes to you that God doesn't give permission.

The devil does not have free reign to do with you whatever he wants to do. If God allows it in your life, if God allows a battle in your life, it is either because you need the test or a brother needs to see you walk through that test and see you walk in victory, and it is also because God knows that he has given you everything you need to pass the test. God does not give you battles and allow you to go through battles to fail.

God's goal is not failure and defeat, God's goal is that you learn in that battle that you are more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul said to Timothy, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ came into the world to save sinners among whom I am the foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy so that in me, as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Paul says, "Listen, God through me, whom I am foremost, I'm the worst sinner."

"I'm worse than anybody I've ever met. He's exhibited His perfect patience. Patience that's not in a hurry." "Oh God, if you just hurry up, let me get to the back, let me get to the other side."

Let me get out there real quick. God's not in a hurry. You know, you can grow too quick. A tree can sprout up very quickly and not have a good root system.

Weeds grow up quickly. I mean, they can grow through asphalt, but they don't have a good root system. You can just take them and pull them out by your hands, but if you want to be an oak for God, it's going to take time.

And my problem is, is I'm in a hurry and God's not. I want to get it all now, and God says, "No, you're not ready to get it all now. I'll give it to you in proportion that you are ready to receive it." And so while I'm moving out, I'm moving in, but then there comes a battle.

I mean, the battle may be fear, it may be depression, it may be discouragement, it may be some crisis, but the devil will throw everything in the world on us. You see, the question in the battle—listen to me, folks, this is very important—the question in the battle is not, "Why is this happening to me?" The question in the battle is, "How come God trusts me with this? God must see something in me that I don't even see in myself, or He wouldn't even trust me with this. God has trusted me with this battle so that I can be a soldier of Jesus Christ, so that I can be a warrior for Him." You see, God is, in His will, is not surprised that we struggle.

He wants us to walk in victory. And I'm saying to you tonight that refresh and revival is not an instantaneous solution to all of our problems. And I'm not trying to discourage you, I'm trying to encourage you, because some of you have already felt tempted to fall back.

The enemies come after you, and you're tempted to take that ground that God has already given you and start backing up and backing up. And as long as you back up, the devil will keep pushing. But when you dig in, and when you say, "I'm not going to be moved from where God has taken me, I'm not going back to where I was, I'm not falling back into that old defensive position, I'm going on the offensive, I'm going forward with God, I'm going to be what He wants me to be, do what He wants me to do."

When the enemy attacks, I'm going to put on the full armor of God, and I'm going to take the ground that God wants me to take. I want to tell you something, the devil doesn't know what to do with you, because most people react just the opposite. They quit and they give up, and they say, "Oh Lord, if you just take this off of me." Can God trust you with a battle? Can God trust you with a battle? Can He send a test your way? And you react to it, not in the heat of the battle, but in having read your Bible and knowing who you are in Christ, can God send a battle to you, and you know, "This is a battle, but I know the victory is already won through Jesus Christ." And you may lose a skirmish every now and then, but folks, I already know who's won the war. And the devil may get me and surprise me, and he may ambush me sometimes, but I want to tell you this, I've read the last two chapters, and he's nowhere to be found in the last two chapters of the book.

He's a loser, he's already lost, he's been defeated, Jesus has overcome death and hell and the grave, so if Jesus has overcome death and hell and the grave, then I guess, kind of maybe, He can probably overcome whatever's going on in my life. Turn to the book of Colossians if you would. Colossians chapter 2 and verse 13.

Hold your place in Colossians, and we're going to go one more place and then we're through. Colossians 2, 13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt"

consisting of decrees against us. Remember, Satan is the accuser of the brethren, we're guilty of trespasses and sin. Which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Verse 15 you ought to underline.

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Listen, the devil's got fiery darts, but you've got a shield. And when you're in the battle, you don't have to be a casualty. When you're in the battle, you don't have to be a statistic.

When you're in the battle, don't run up the white flag, because it may be a discouragement to the soldier who's standing by you, who starts to live in fear because they see you go down. And they begin to quake in their boots and wonder, "Can I make it?" So I want you to turn to Ephesians chapter 6. We're going to do a little exercise here. And then Mark, I want us to sing in Jesus' name and press on again.

Ephesians 6 and verse 10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore, since our struggle is not against flesh and blood, we don't fight with flesh and blood. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish some of the fiery darts. Oh, does it say "all" in yours? Does anybody not say "all"? Does anybody say "some"? I guess it means "all." So that you may extinguish all of the flaming arrows of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is your opinion. It's the Word of God. How do you fight the devil? Well, I think devil.

I feel devil. I was of the opinion devil. No.

What did Jesus do on the Mount of Temptation? He quoted the Word of God. Listen, the devil hates praise and he hates the Word. And if you believe that the Word of God is the Word of God, then stand on it.

Put your feet down. Put your heels down. Dig in and say, "On the authority of the Word of God, you have no authority over me." Don't back up.

Don't backpedal. You stand and your sword is the Word of God. You just pull that sword out and say, "Have you seen this likely devil? Do you know what this thing can do to you?" I know what Jesus did with it, and I plan to do the same thing with you.

I'm going to cut you open like a Christmas turkey. I don't get haughty about it, but you have a sword for a reason. And if you keep it in your sheath and you just keep it to your side and you don't use it, it's your fault.

Get your sword out. Get the Word out. And by the way, sometimes you don't have time to grab your favorite translation of the Bible.

That's why you need to have it in your head. Because the Word of God in your head, God brings to mind in the battle. And he says, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." That means we're supposed to pray for one another.

That's why we did that at the beginning of the service tonight. Because we are supposed, we are commanded to pray for one another. And pray on my behalf.

Paul is saying, "You pray for the minister too." "Pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known the boldness of the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in charge, that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." One of the things I ask you to pray for me is that when I speak, I speak boldly. I don't cow down. I don't back up.

I don't just say what might make people feel good. I say the truth. I say it in love, but I say it with authority.

That it is the Word of God, and we don't back up from the Word of God. Now here's what I want to ask you to do, and then we're going to sing this song. I want to ask you right now to just go through Ephesians 6, 10-18, and I want you to just, in your praying, put your armor on.

As God shows you a peace, say, "Lord, I take the helmet of salvation. Lord, I take the breastplate of righteousness." And by the way, this is a good thing to do when you get up every day because you're going to war every time you get up. Every day you get up, you're going to war.

So you ought to get up every morning, and you ought to pray, "God, I want to put on the full armor of God. I don't want any weak spots. I don't want to have a place where the devil can get me and drive a sword inside of me because I'm not fully prepared and fully equipped." When a soldier gets ready to go to battle, they get every piece of armor on, every piece of equipment on, so that they are the best equipped they can possibly be to face whatever the enemy's going to throw at them.

And so here's what I want to ask you to do. I want to ask you to pray it out loud. Okay? So, the devil can't read your mind, by the way, but he can hear your words if he's here.

And so you just need to let him know what you're about to do. And so I want to ask you to pray out loud and to put your armor on. Okay? Just put it on, just tell the Lord you're choosing to put it on, by faith you're putting it on, you're going to equip yourself for the battle that's ahead for this week, and then after we've done that, we're going to sing this song.

All right? So you do it right now. You pray out loud, and then in just a moment we'll sing. Would you pray and repeat after me, please? Lord Jesus, I have put on my armor.

I do not know what battles I will face. But on the authority of the Word of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit, I walk in victory. The devil cannot defeat me.

The enemy has no authority in my life. I have covered my head to my toes. I am secure in my salvation.

I am bought by the blood of the Lamb. I am sealed by the Holy Spirit. So whatever battles come my way, I will be victorious through Christ Jesus.

I can overcome through Christ Jesus. I can have victory through Christ Jesus. Lord, you know what's ahead of me.

Show me, please, how I can fight this battle. Give me a sharp sword to use. Help me to stand in your power.

I am an overcomer through Jesus Christ. I am more than conqueror through Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit of God, I am pressing on.

I need your help. I will fail if you don't help me. I will listen to the enemy if I don't listen to you.

So right now, I yield to you in total surrender. In Jesus' name, we press on.

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