

*Chapter Fourteen***The Helmet of Salvation**

*Take the helmet of salvation. (Ephesians 6:17)*

The man was terrified. He told me that he was afraid of supernatural spirits. He had grown up in a secular, scientific setting, but he became curious about supernatural powers. He got involved with people who spoke of “white magic.” They had a cheerful, appealing view of witchcraft and nature worship. The contact with spirits was exciting, and the nature worship seemed respectful of the environment. At first he enjoyed it, but gradually the spirits grew darker and more evil. Within a few years, he felt trapped by powers he had never dared to imagine. By the time he spoke to me, he desperately wanted to be free, but he had a hard time believing it could happen. How could he escape these terrible powers? How could he recover from the damage to his soul? This man had chosen to get involved with unseen powers, and now he feared he was beyond hope.

Other people don’t make a choice to get involved with spirits; they are born into it. If your parents, relatives, and culture are wrapped up in spiritism, you grow up trying to please various spirits—perhaps the spirit of a particular house or river, the spirit of a tree or animal, or the spirit ruling a whole region. You believe your health and success depend on the spirits. If things go well for you, you figure the spirits are favoring you. If something goes wrong, you think a spirit is against you. This can be terrifying. You

fear the spirits, and you fear other people who might influence the spirits. If somebody hates you, puts you under a curse, and turns a spirit against you, you might fear that nothing can break the spell. Nothing can save you.

If you grow up with spiritism, it’s hard to leave it completely, even if you hear the gospel of Jesus and start calling yourself a Christian. You might be baptized and believe something about Jesus. You might even be taught the truth that Jesus is more powerful than any spirit. But when a crisis hits, you might take the spirits more seriously than you take Jesus. The old traditional religion seems more real than Christianity. If you’re having problems, you might not be satisfied to pray to God about them; you might seek help from the old spirits. If you get sick, a tribal healer who knows how to deal with the spirits may seem more valuable to you than a pastor. You may think your illness comes from a spirit that’s against you, and the only way to be healed is to perform some ritual or to do something that persuades the spirit to stop afflicting you.

Some people might try to convince you that the spirit world isn’t real, that it’s all superstition. They might try to make you more scientific and sensible. But that doesn’t always help. Some fears and beliefs in spirits are just superstition, but sometimes real demonic powers are involved. Once you’ve felt the grip of a cruel supernatural power, it doesn’t work to deny the supernatural. You know that power is real. The only way you can be free is to have the help of someone with supernatural power even greater than the spirits who are harming you. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is strong enough to save you from all evil spirits.

The Bible speaks of spirits that affect our lives, and the experience of many people confirms that these spirits are real. It won’t work to say they’re not real. But even if they are real, even if people put curses on you, even if bad spirits attack you, don’t be terrified. Don’t try to make deals with the spirits. Don’t use traditional rituals to appeal to

them. Don't try to please the spirits in order to make your life easier. If you do that, you are falling into the spirits' trap. You are playing by their rules, and you'll never win that way. If hostile spirits have hurt you in the past and still want to harm you, don't try to please them. Fight them and defeat them.

Many people are too afraid to fight. They are certain that the spirits control the future, and they don't dare go against them. They don't think they can win. If you feel that way, then your fear will come true—you can't win if you don't expect victory, if you have no hope of salvation, no certainty that your future is in the hands of the Lord Jesus. But if you belong to Jesus and have the sure hope of salvation, you can overcome fear, defeat the demons, and march toward victory. The Bible speaks of wearing "the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

### **Satan's Goal**

When evil spirits attack, you need a strong helmet. The ruler of the evil spirits is Satan, and he specializes in despair. He knows that if you are hopeless, you are also helpless against him. Satan wants you to think that you don't have a future and that the world doesn't have a future.

To accomplish this goal, Satan and his evil spirits use different tactics with different individuals and different cultures. In some cultures, the spirits make their power obvious in an effort to enslave people. In other cultures, the spirits keep a low profile and seek to undermine belief in anything supernatural, including God. Satan convinces some people and cultures that the spirits of their traditional religion control the future. Satan convinces other people and cultures that the supernatural world doesn't even exist, that there are no spirits and no God, that mechanical laws of nature are the only reality, that there is no life after death for any individual and that the universe itself is

headed for a future of total deadness. Satan's methods differ, but his goal is the same: hopelessness.

People who pride themselves on a scientific mindset might not feel bound by enemy spirits, but they can be just as grim about the future. For instance, columnist George Will wrote an article echoing the belief among many educated people that the sun will eventually burn out and all life will be snuffed out. "Earth heads for frigid lifelessness." George Will accepts the theory of biology that our past is rooted in animal ancestors, and he accepts the theory of geology that the earth, which provides humans with a livable environment for the moment, will someday change and make life impossible. "Although the planet is hospitable for the moment, it is indifferent—eventually it will be lethally indifferent—to its human passengers." The secular, scientific mindset is as hopeless as a mindset terrified of hostile spirits. A universe without hope or meaning—this is what Satan wants you to believe.

If you go to schools which teach a mechanical universe, if you think humanity is headed for extinction, you need the hope of salvation as your helmet. The idea that the present world will come to an end and that people are headed for death isn't exactly news, of course. The Bible says the same thing. In Isaiah 51:8 God says, "The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever." Even after you die, even after the world ends, there is new life and a new creation. When you believe that, you have a strong helmet of hope.

The Bible is amazing. It takes the spirit world as seriously as any traditional tribal religion, yet it puts these spirits in their place by declaring the supreme authority of Jesus and his victory over evil spirits. The Bible takes the death of humans and the end of the world as seriously as the grimmest scientific materialist, yet God declares the living hope of resurrection and a new earth. What a differ-

ence to have the helmet of salvation! What a difference to know that the ultimate power is not the spirits of traditional religions or the forces of matter and energy but the almighty power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ!

### The Blessed Hope

Ephesians 6:17 says, “Take the helmet of salvation.” A similar statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 speaks of “taking the *hope* of salvation as a helmet.” Sometimes when the Bible speaks of salvation, it means having your sins forgiven, being made right with God, and rescued from Satan’s grip. In this context, though, the Bible is talking about *final* salvation. The hope of salvation is confidence in the second coming of Jesus, the final defeat of Satan and the forces of evil, the resurrection of the dead, and life in the new heaven and new earth.

This great hope for the future is a strong protection against Satan in the present. To resist Satan’s temptations and obey God, you need to be confident that even if evil seems to bring success for the moment, holiness triumphs in the end. This mighty hope enables you to keep saying “No” to Satan and “Yes” to God.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

When the Bible says to take the helmet of salvation, or to take the hope of salvation as a helmet, this is what it means: “we wait for *the blessed hope*—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Don’t be trapped by fear of any spirits or spells. Even if such things have dominated you and people around you, Jesus opens up a fantastic future. If you think only about

the short term and not the eternal future, you might ask various spirits for help—and it might even work for a time. If you care only about getting over a sickness or improving your income, and if you’re willing to sell your soul by seeking help from the spirits, they may help you get what you want, but you will be their slave. Don’t let that happen. Trust Jesus. Jesus is more powerful than all the spirits combined, and he can set you free from their grip. Right now he can help you live in spiritual freedom, and at his second coming, he will bring joy to all who trust his salvation.

In the short term, though, Jesus might not give you all the success or health you were hoping for. Does that mean you should give up on Jesus and go back to spirits and try to get favors from them? No, even if Jesus doesn’t give you what you want right away, keep trusting him anyway. He knows what’s best for you, and if you trust him, you will be glad in the end.

In some traditional religions, the spirits offer ways to get them on your side, or at least to keep them from making you miserable. But these spirits are demons, and it’s deadly to deal with demons. Would you make business deals with someone you can’t trust, someone who lies constantly? If not, then why try to make deals with Satan? He lies all the time. Sometimes he threatens people who already belong to Jesus and tries to make them think they can’t be free from his spirits, but the fact is that a spirit cannot take over the life of someone who belongs to Jesus. If threats don’t work for Satan, he and his spirits may promise to make you happier, and they might even give you some short-term results, but their long-term goal is to keep you from Christ and to have you suffer in hell forever. Don’t make deals with lying spirits. Even if you get what you want for awhile, don’t forget: Satan gladly lets you have less problems if he can bring you to hell forever.

Think of Satan as a general who wants to destroy a country but first needs to get some people on his side before he can wipe them all out. He offers bribes and makes threats to get people on his side, but he still hates those who go along with him. After he has used them, he will torment and ruin them.

Or think of Satan as a murderous crime boss who bullies people to do what he wants or else pays them off to commit criminal acts. Eventually he has them killed after he has no more use for them. People in a crime syndicate may like the extra money and perks their boss gives them, but what good are those favors after he murders them? And even if he lets you live longer, what good are his favors when the crime boss is arrested by the authorities and punished? When he is punished, you also are punished for going along with him and doing his work. Satan is a crime boss who is headed for prison in hell. Those who make deals with him and his spirits will also be imprisoned in hell forever, unless they turn away from Satan to God.

Even so, it can be very tempting to go along with Satan, just as it can be tempting to take bribes to help an enemy general or a crime boss. If they offer you enough money, or threaten harshly enough, you may think your prosperity and your very survival depend on the spirits. But dealing with spirits destroys you in the end. That's why God warns you not to seek help from other spirits or perform rituals to please them. God knows that those spirits only want to use you and ruin you. God wants you to have his joy and eternal life with him. God tells you to pray to him, and only to him. Don't commit treason against God by going along with spirits who are God's enemies.

If these spirits threaten you, don't make deals with them, and don't give in to despair. Take the helmet of salvation! Put your faith in Jesus. Place yourself under his protection right now, and keep looking for Jesus to return. Be ready to meet him. Jesus has already won the decisive

battle over Satan, and when he comes again, the victory will be complete. So count on his victory over the evil spirits—don't let the demons fool you. Don't let them bribe and corrupt you with their promises of special favors and powers. Don't let them discourage or crush you with fear. Let the hope of salvation be your helmet.

When you put on the helmet of salvation, you and the Lord have matching helmets. The Bible envisions the Lord putting "the helmet of salvation on his head" and promises, "The Redeemer will come" (Isaiah 59:17,20). When your helmet of salvation matches Jesus' helmet, you are sure to win.

### **Count On His Coming**

How do you put on the helmet of salvation? By counting on Jesus' second coming and looking forward to it. The return of Jesus is not a minor, optional part of Christianity. It is at the heart of the faith, right along with forgiveness through Jesus' death. The Bible says, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:27-28). If you are born again, you have a future focus. The Bible says God "has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... through faith [you] are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time... you are filled in an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:3-9).

This joyful anticipation of Jesus' coming is a helmet of defense that protects against entanglement with spirits and false religion. It also protects against secularism without a future. Secularism denies the supernatural, teaches that death is the end of us, and that the world will keep running



by mechanical laws of nature till it ends in ruin. That hopeless outlook destroys morality and meaning and becomes an excuse to chase pleasure. The Bible says that if this view were true, the logical response would be, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32). Have a blast while you last. Why not do anything you please, no matter how wrong it might be, no matter who gets hurt? If there is no God and no eternal future—no rewards for painful sacrifice and no punishment for selfish sin—then pursuing pleasure is the only point of existence. It’s no accident that in the pleasure-crazy societies of modern secularism, our educators teach theories which deny the supernatural and deny an eternal future. Satan attacks many minds with such thinking. When your head is under attack, you need a helmet: the hope of salvation.

We saw earlier that people who become Christians after growing up in a culture of spiritism may be tempted to go back to the old spirits when times get tough and Christianity doesn’t seem to be getting results. But what if you’re a Christian in a culture not of spiritism but of secularism? Well, there too, Satan will try to discourage you in tough times and make you wonder if Christianity is true and worthwhile. He tempts you to give up on the whole thing.

Satan doesn’t always try to persuade with clever arguments. Sometimes he tries to overwhelm your faith with disappointment and discouragement. If prayers don’t get the answer you want, if year after year goes by without Jesus coming back, you feel disappointed, and Satan makes you wonder if the Lord is real at all. If you’ve been fighting to be a better person and to make the world a better place but don’t see much improvement, you feel discouraged and wonder whether the struggle is worth it. Why keep fighting? If you struggle in your personal life, if you see the church losing ground, if you see society headed in the wrong direction, you may feel like giving up on Christ. You feel worn out, and Satan whispers, “What’s the use?”

Jesus will never come back. The eternal future is just a dream. The world is the way it has been and always will be. Get real. Give up. Just try to enjoy yourself for a few years before you die.”

At such moments, take the helmet of salvation. Remind yourself that God’s timing may be different from yours, but that Jesus will surely come to bring salvation to those who are watching for him and working for him. The Bible says,

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night... But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that this day should surprise you. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day... So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled... putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and *the hope of salvation as a helmet*. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).

When Satan tempts you to give up on Jesus, don’t do it. Put on your helmet and say, “God has appointed me to receive salvation. I don’t know when the final day will come, but I’m looking forward to it. Meanwhile, I’m not going to let Satan drag me down or discourage me. I’m not going to listen to those who scoff about Jesus’ second coming and say it’s not going to happen. I’m going to pray that they will come to believe in Jesus and join his cause before it’s too late for them. Meanwhile, until Jesus comes, I’m going to take this hope of salvation as my helmet and keep fighting Satan.” Keep reminding yourself, “Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11).

Jesus says there will be hard times before he comes, and some who call themselves Christians will give up.

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,” says Jesus, “but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13). The helmet of salvation protects you from fear and discouragement so that you can stand firm to the end. You don’t have to be terrified by events which terrify other people, especially if these events are signs that we are nearing the end. In fact, when things are at their worst, Jesus may be right at the door. Jesus says, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

Satan is in the business of despair, of denying a joyful future. Whether he uses secularism or spiritism or some other method, he doesn’t want people to see that the future is Jesus. Satan wants non-Christians to keep ignoring the fact that Jesus is coming. Satan wants Christians to get weary of waiting and to give up on Jesus’ coming. But Jesus provides the helmet of salvation, the hope of his coming.

If you wear that helmet and live in the hope of Jesus’ return, your hope will be rewarded. Jesus promises, “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations... just as I have received authority from my Father... To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 2:26-27, 3:21). Wear your helmet now, knowing that Jesus will someday replace your helmet with a crown.

## Chapter Fifteen

### The Sword of the Spirit

*Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)*

In the *Star Wars* movies, what is the ultimate weapon? The light saber. The best warriors are the Jedi knights, and their chief weapon is the light saber. When we turn from the make-believe world of movies to the real world of spiritual warfare, the ultimate weapon is also a light saber. To battle Satan and his demons and the forces of evil, you need something that is both a sword and a light—in other words, a light saber.

“Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). “The word of God is sharper than any double-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). God’s Word is a sword, and at the same time, it’s a light. Biblical writers declare, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path... The unfolding of your words gives light” (Psalm 119:105). “For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light” (Proverbs 6:23). “Pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). The Bible is the light saber we need to battle the dark emperor, Satan, and his evil empire.

In some ways, the sword of the Spirit is like some special swords in J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy epic *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo the hobbit had a special sword called Sting. When evil orcs were anywhere near, Sting sensed their presence and glowed with bluish light, warning Frodo

that an attack was coming. In a similar way, when you have the Holy Spirit and your thinking is in tune with the Bible, the sword of the Spirit detects evil for you. Someone presents a non-biblical teaching, and it just sounds wrong to you—your sword is glowing. Someone suggests a tempting course of action, and it feels wrong to you—your sword is glowing. You can sense when evil is near, even if you can't explain exactly what's wrong. A biblical writer says, "The commands of the Lord are radiant... By them is your servant warned" (Psalm 19:8,11). If anyone is trying to lead you astray, the Holy Spirit's presence and the truth of his Word impressed on your heart keep you from being easily fooled. "The anointing you received from God remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you... his anointing teaches you about all things" (1 John 2:26-27). Frodo knew orcs were coming when his sword glowed, and you can know evil is attacking when the sword of the Spirit glows.

The sword of the Spirit doesn't just alert you to evil; it also *defeats* evil. Think of another shining sword in *The Lord of the Rings*, Anduril, the sword of the future king, Aragorn. In Tolkien's words, "The bright blade of Anduril shone like a sudden flame." Long ago, this very sword had cut the ring of power from the hand of the dark lord, Sauron. When the sword was active again in the hand of Aragorn, it meant the dark lord would soon meet his final defeat. As the sword Anduril had a history, so the sword of the Spirit has a history. The sword of Tolkien's tale had defeated the fictional Sauron, but the sword God gives us has defeated Satan himself, who is real and more terrible than any dark lord of fiction. God's Word defeated Satan before—and it will do so again. It is the weapon Satan fears most.

I don't know how much of this Tolkien had in mind when he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. As a Christian author, he certainly believed in the great conflict between

good and evil, but his epic trilogy isn't an allegory. Tolkien didn't mean each detail to have a biblical parallel. Even so, the ability of the sword Sting to detect enemy attackers, and the history of the sword Anduril in defeating the dark lord, can give us hints of what the sword of the Spirit can do in the battle against Satan.

### **The Master Swordsman**

Do you know the power of the sword God has given us? Do you know what mighty victories it has already won? Do you know who used that sword before passing it along to you? The sword God gives us is the very same sword that Jesus used. To know the full value of this sword and to learn how to use it, we should see how the master swordsman has used it.

Just before Jesus began his public ministry, he faced Satan directly. Before he healed others and freed them from demons and brought God's loving reign into their lives, Jesus first had his own showdown with the evil one. Before he helped anyone else, Jesus first proved that he himself could stand up against Satan's temptations and defeat him. How did he succeed? By using the sword of the Spirit! With the Holy Spirit in his heart and the Word of God on his lips, Jesus defeated Satan.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit... was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me,

and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

Satan staggered away, defeated by the sword of the Spirit.

Jesus slashed apart all three of Satan’s temptations by quoting the Bible. When Satan tempted Jesus to misuse miraculous powers for selfish purposes and to put bodily desires over his relationship to his heavenly Father, Jesus struck back with, “It is written!” When Satan offered Jesus a pain-free path to power, telling him he could bypass God’s way of suffering to reclaim the world and could have world domination simply by honoring Satan instead of the heavenly Father, Jesus struck back with, “It is written!” Finally, Satan tried to use the Bible itself against Jesus, tempting him to take a suicidal leap and see if biblical promises of angel protection were really true. But the Bible is not the sword of Satan; it is the sword of the Spirit. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, knew right away that Satan was misusing Scripture, and Jesus struck back by quoting the biblical truth which really fit the situation: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” All three of Jesus’ quotes came from the Bible book of Deuteronomy. Some of us hardly know that part of the Bible, but Jesus knew it. Because Jesus knew his Bible so well and because he used it in the

wisdom and strength of the Holy Spirit, he could recognize what was wrong with Satan’s temptations and could slash those temptations to pieces.

When the Bible says that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil, I’ve sometimes wondered why the Holy Spirit would put Jesus in such a position. But I’ve come to understand that the Spirit did it not to endanger Jesus but to deal a blow to Satan and to make Jesus most effective in bringing God’s kingdom to others by first winning his own personal battle against Satan. If you are a Spirit-filled follower of Jesus, sometimes the Spirit will do something similar with you: he will lead you into a desert of difficulty and temptation, not to put your soul at risk but to deal a blow to Satan, and to make you most effective in bringing God’s kingdom to others by first winning your own personal battle against Satan. You can defeat Satan and make him flee. He will try again some other time, just as he kept watching for other opportunities to tempt Jesus. But if you take God’s armor as your protection, and the sword of the Spirit as your ultimate weapon, you can keep driving Satan back.

Jesus, the master swordsman, has beaten Satan and has shown us how it’s done. Now he puts the sword in our hand and directs us to use it in the strength of the Holy Spirit. During Jesus’ time on earth, he preached the gospel of God’s kingdom, healed the sick, and drove out demons—and he wasn’t the only one to do those things. Jesus sent his followers to do the same. He started with his inner core, the twelve apostles.

He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick... So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere (Luke 9:1-6).



After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "...Heal the sick... and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God is near you' ... he who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 9:1-16, 10:1-20).

In all of this, Jesus was "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21). His friends' names were recorded in God's book of life, and the sword he had put in their hands was defeating the enemy and opening the way for others to enter God's kingdom.

These are not just things that happened long ago. They can keep happening right now. If you follow Jesus and put your confidence in him, the very same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus and his first missionaries will empower you. The very same sword of the Spirit, the Word of God written in the Bible and spoken in your testimony, is the sword you can use to fight off temptation, make Satan fall with a crash, and win more people and more territory. Jesus, the master swordsman, offers you the very sword he used so successfully against Satan. Become Jesus' apprentice. Learn from the Master how to use this sword most effectively.

### **A Neglected Weapon**

If we take an honest look today at people who own a Bible and say they believe in Jesus, it might not appear that they have the ultimate weapon against evil. Many people who own Bibles are not fighting off Satan or defeating him; instead, Satan is defeating them. Is that because the Bible isn't a strong enough weapon? No, it's because people aren't using it. The Bible isn't a weak weapon; it's a neglected weapon. If you own a Bible but lay it on a shelf and don't use it, and then go into a sin-dominated world without God's Word as your weapon, it's like walking into the enemy camp and laying your weapon down. The army of the Lord has the ultimate weapon, the sword of the Spirit, and we can't afford to lay that weapon down. But that's what far too many people are doing.

Nowhere in the world do more people own Bibles than in North America. But in most of the homes, the Bible stays on the shelf, with the result that Satan is defeating many Americans and Canadians. The level of divorce, despair, pornography, selfishness, greed, addiction, error, and violence is high in these countries where so many own Bibles and call themselves Christians. Polls find that most Canadians and Americans believe in God and in Jesus as the Son of God. God may be doing well in polls, but polls don't amount to much in spiritual warfare. Replying to a survey is one thing; defeating Satan is quite another. Many Canadians and Americans believe in Jesus and own Bibles, but far fewer are triumphing over Satan, overcoming temptation, disciplining others, and making their culture more Christ-like. A huge part of the reason for this failure is that most are not using the sword of the Spirit. They own Bibles but don't read them. They consider themselves part of a church, but seldom attend or hear biblical preaching.

Of the huge number of American teenagers who say they are Christians, two out of three think Satan is not a real being but just a symbol of evil. Over half say Jesus

committed sins while he was on earth. What confusion! How can Jesus be divine and still commit sins? How can anyone claim to take the Bible seriously and yet say that Satan is only a symbol? Such ideas would sound ridiculous to anyone who really knows the Bible, but many who claim Christianity are almost clueless about what the Bible actually says. Most people own Bibles, but how many really read the Bible and believe it and see it as the ultimate weapon in a war against a deadly, demonic enemy? We have the sword of the Spirit, but we have no idea how to use it against Satan because we don't know the Scripture, and we don't recognize the enemy.

The problem is not a shortage of Bibles but a shortage of Bible *reading* and biblical *living*. As fewer people read the Bible at home, and as fewer churches uphold biblical truth, they become spiritually weaker. Their marriages become less stable, their children become more prone to trouble and less interested in church, and various other problems become more frequent. If more people would live by God's Word and bring it to others, the result would be more divine blessing and fewer casualties of Satan's attacks.

Churches and denominations that neglect biblical doctrines and morality have mostly been shrinking, while those that teach biblical truth and high standards of holiness are attracting people. Those who neglect the sword of the Spirit are losing, while those who use the sword are advancing in the battle against sin and Satan. This is true not just in North America but in Africa and in every other part of the world. Countless people claim to be Christians, but only those who faithfully read the Bible and live by the Spirit can overcome Satan and live differently from the world around them.

### **Fight with Confidence**

When I mention the widespread neglect of Scripture, I'm not just saying, "Naughty, naughty! Shame on you for not reading your Bible more often!" Reading your Bible is not a matter of doing your homework to get a gold star from your teacher. It is a matter of using your light saber to fight off the enemy and drive him back. My main concern is that so many people are losing to Satan when they could be winning. Retreat and defeat could turn to victory if only they would start using the sword of the Spirit.

Let's forget the polls and surveys and talk about you. How often do you read the Bible? How well do you know it? Do you know specific truths that drive back error and fight off temptation? If the Son of God himself depended on Scripture to fight Satan, how can you possibly fight Satan without it? Take up the sword. Get a grip on your light saber. Read your Bible faithfully—not just weekly, but daily. Listen to the Bible preached faithfully in church. The better your grip on the sword of the Spirit, the more you can defeat Satan. Husbands and wives who read the Bible and pray together daily almost never get divorced. Children who are trained each day in God's Word are much less likely to fall into Satan's clutches. Sin isn't just a matter of naughtiness and guilt. Sin wounds and wrecks your life. And God's Word is the ultimate weapon against sin. As a biblical writer puts it, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). So arm yourself and your family and your friends with the ultimate weapon. If you have a Bible, use it!

When you fight Satan, use the very sword Jesus used. Fight in the power of the very Spirit who empowered Jesus. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit produced it, the Holy Spirit guides you in how to use it, and the Holy Spirit energizes it and makes it effective. The Bible "never had its origins in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along *by the Ho-*

ly Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit made this sword, and the Holy Spirit teaches you to use it. Without the Spirit of God, you can’t understand the things of God, and you can’t put his weapon to good use. But the Spirit gives you “the mind of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:11-16). The Spirit brings alive the words of the Bible, enabling you to think like Jesus, understand spiritual truth as Jesus does, and to defeat Satan as Jesus did. And when Satan attacks, the mighty, limitless power of the Spirit enters your sword, defeating Satan and destroying his strongholds. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). The gospel is the power of God for defeating Satan and bringing salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:18).

When you use the sword of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit may lead you into some hard situations, just as he led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan. The Spirit may do this to help you prove your strength and grow toward maturity.

I read about a village in which a boy would be considered a man when he turned thirteen. On the night of his thirteenth birthday, some villagers would blindfold the boy and lead him far into the forest. When the blindfold was removed, the boy would find himself alone in total darkness. There he would spend the night. Unable to see much of anything, he might hear the howl of a wolf, the growl of a bear, the snarl of a mountain lion. He might hear twigs cracking and branches snapping nearby and not know what sort of enemy or predator might be approaching. Then, as dawn got closer and the light increased, he would begin to see the green of leaves and the color of flowers. And then he would see something else: a strong man, a heavily

armed warrior, standing guard a short distance away. It was his father. The father had been there all along, ready to defend his son from any dangers that lurked in the dark. The boy became a man by going through the danger, but even as a man, he was still not alone. He had a guard and defender.

You may go through something similar. You may feel alone, surrounded by the powers of darkness. That can be scary, but it can also be an opportunity for greater maturity. As the Bible says, “Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13 NASB). But even as you grow stronger, more mature, more skilled in using your sword, the Holy Spirit is right there, beside you and within you. That’s all the more reason to live with confidence and to fight with confidence. The Spirit not only gives you the ultimate weapon; he himself is the ultimate friend and defender.

## Chapter Sixteen

### Warrior Prayer

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)*

Napoleon once said, “An army marches on its stomach.” He didn’t mean that soldiers always crawl on their bellies. He meant that troops need good meals in their stomachs in order to march to victory. No matter how brilliant the generals, no matter how brave the soldiers, they can’t win battles if they are starving or freezing. Troops need food and other supplies.

Napoleon knew this, but a shortage of supplies still turned out to be his downfall. In 1812, he invaded Russia with a huge army, larger than anyone had ever seen. As Napoleon advanced, the Russians did little to stop him. Rather than fight a head-on battle, the Russians kept retreating. As they retreated, they left nothing behind for the invading army to use as supplies. The farther Napoleon advanced into Russia, the longer the supply lines became. Small groups of Russians kept attacking the supply lines at various points.

Eventually the supply lines were so long and so unreliable that Napoleon’s army faced devastating shortages. There was a shortage of food, and many of the soldiers suffered from lack of nourishment. There was a shortage of medical supplies and bandages, and many perished from lack of proper treatment. There was a shortage of clothing

and fuel for fires and heating, and when the terrible Russian winter struck, many of Napoleon’s men shivered and died of hypothermia and cold-related diseases. For every man who died in battle, five died of other causes, mostly due to shortages of supplies. Napoleon had to leave Russia, his army in tatters.

In 1941, another dictator decided to invade Russia. Adolph Hitler had easily conquered most of Europe already, and his army seemed unbeatable. Hitler invaded Russia with an army even larger than Napoleon’s had been—more than three million soldiers, with thousands of tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Hitler’s forces advanced swiftly, and the Russians retreated, leaving little the Germans could use for food and supplies. The farther the German army moved into Russia, the longer the supply lines became. Winter came. Russian snipers kept attacking the German lines of supply and communication. Hitler’s troops lacked food, fuel, and winter clothing. Finally, after terrible losses on both sides, the Russian forces defeated the weakened German troops and drove them back.

“An army marches on its stomach.” Military campaigns depend on supplies. That’s true in spiritual warfare as well: you need a constant flow of supplies. When you’re fighting Satan, you need to be strong, brave, and well equipped with God’s armor and weapons, but you also need nourishment to keep up your energy. You need good supply lines.

### Supply Line

What’s your spiritual supply line? What connects you with headquarters? Prayer. Prayer is the line between you and God. It is through prayer that God supplies your daily needs. It is through prayer that you get refreshed and reenergized for serving Jesus and battling Satan.

In Ephesians 6, the Bible calls God’s people to combat and presents various pieces of spiritual armor and weapon-



ry. But it doesn't stop there. Ephesians 6:18 goes on to say, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Prayer is the way to get fresh supplies, inner nourishment, and everything necessary for a soldier of Jesus to stay healthy and strong in spirit.

When we pray, we are getting supplies from divine headquarters. God has no shortage of resources to draw from. Earlier in Ephesians, the apostle Paul says that God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). There is no need too great for God to meet, no prayer too big for God to answer. God never runs out of resources. The Bible says, "God is able to make all grace to abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). If I suffer a spiritual shortage, the problem is not that headquarters has no more supplies to send me. The problem is that the supply lines are interrupted by failure of prayer.

Satan will do all he can to hinder your prayers. He doesn't have to defeat you in direct combat if he can manage to starve your soul by cutting off any prayer connection with God. Satan can use a method similar to what the Russians did against Napoleon. Russian fighters were often busier interrupting the supply lines than trying to take on the main army. Likewise, Satan may find it more effective not to confront you directly with a huge temptation or a terrible tragedy. He may simply attack your supply line and keep you from prayer. If he succeeds in doing that, your defeat will be only a matter of time.

Maybe you have no interest in prayer. In that case, you have no relationship with God, and you're not in his army at all. You're not a soldier for Christ; you're in the realm controlled by Satan. The devil already has you where he wants you, and if you never start praying, you'll remain far

from God and under Satan's domination. One of the first signs of salvation, one of the first marks of spiritual life, is prayer, real communication with God. The apostle Paul was once a murderer and an enemy of Jesus. When Jesus transformed Paul, the Lord sent another Christian to help Paul. What did Jesus tell this person to indicate that Paul was a new person, no longer enslaved by Satan? Jesus said, "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11).

Spiritual life begins in prayer, and it is sustained through prayer. To be a Christian is to have God's life in your inner being. The more the Holy Spirit fills you with life and power, the more energy you have to defend yourself against Satan, march forward against him, and rescue others from his wicked reign. Prayer nourishes and strengthens the Spirit-life within you. This inner nourishment, this filling by the Holy Spirit, is not automatic. It comes in answer to prayer. God is a loving Father, willing and able to keep filling your inner being with more and more of his life, but this won't happen without prayer. To those who are suffering from spiritual shortages, the Bible says, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). Jesus says, "Your Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who *ask* him" (Luke 11:13). Prayer is your supply line. It's the way to receive God's resources. You can't battle Satan if your inner self is empty and starving. Wherever you go, whatever you do, maintain the supply lines. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Prayer is the way spiritual warriors get supplies from heavenly headquarters. Racing into new situations without prayer is like launching a military invasion without any supply lines. You can try lots of things, pour your effort and energy into them, and end up feeling weak and empty inside. This is true of any warrior who fails to pray, and it's especially true for leaders. If you're a pastor, an elder,

or a teacher, you may be very skilled and have some excellent ideas. You may be like an elite soldier with superb training, the finest protection, the latest weaponry, and the most brilliant strategy. But how many victories can you win if you're starving?

Without prayer, your inner being becomes emptier, weaker and more famished, and you end up in defeat. Some church leaders fall into scandal. Others don't do anything awful; they just quit the ministry in discouragement and despair. When do leaders become most vulnerable to scandalous behavior? Often it's after they've poured their energy into all sorts of people and projects without taking the time to renew their own souls through prayer and communion with God. What causes some leaders to burn out, give up, and quit their calling? Often it's not a lack of talent or training or accomplishment but because they neglect their own spirit for too long and don't maintain their supply line with God's Holy Spirit. Long before Satan attacks with a particular scandalous temptation or an overwhelming feeling of despair, he may first be busy attacking supply lines, keeping you from connecting with God through prayer.

Keep the supply line open. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions." Stay in touch with God. Let his Spirit nourish your spirit. Then you will be able to resist temptation and discouragement, and you can help those around you. As the Bible says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me... And my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 NASB). When you have that kind of supply line, you can feast on God's goodness and rejoice in him. This is the nourishment you need to stay strong against Satan.

### **Line of Communication**

Prayer is our supply line. It's also our line of communication. Communication is vital to any relationship, and

especially for our relationship with God. In prayer we converse with God as our Father and Friend, but here I want to emphasize warrior prayer: communicating with the Lord as our supreme commander.

A military force needs excellent communication and coordination in order to win battles. Soldiers must know what their commanders want. Generals must know where attacks are coming from, where reinforcements are needed, and how each unit is progressing. In spiritual warfare, prayer is the way we stay in touch with headquarters and coordinate our own efforts with the Lord's battle plan.

If you are a soldier for Jesus, he doesn't want you racing around, fighting here and there, without knowing your orders. You need your commander's direction so that you serve his strategy. In other words, you need his wisdom. How can you get it? The Bible says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). To get God's wisdom and guidance, just ask! Pray! Your commander won't scold you for asking. He'll guide you and direct you where he wants you to be. He provides basic training and overall guidance through the Bible, and when you need special guidance for a particular situation, his Spirit will impress on your spirit the wisest course of action. But this isn't automatic. You must ask. You must "pray in the Spirit on all occasions." The more you communicate with God, the more he will communicate with you and let you know what he wants you to do next.

You can communicate with headquarters to find out what God wants, and you can also pray to tell God what you need. This gives you a huge advantage in spiritual warfare. Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed by Satan's forces. You feel surrounded with no way out. But you can still pray. You can call headquarters for an air strike. Soldiers who are backed by superior air power aren't necessarily defeated just because their unit is outgunned and

outmaneuvered on the ground. They can radio for extra help, and within minutes, fighter jets or attack helicopters swoop in to deal with the enemy. Even if you're a lowly foot soldier in God's army, air support is only a prayer away. God can send extra angels to your defense, and he can direct his own vast power against the evil forces that have you pinned down.

In Exodus 17, the Bible describes a battle between God's people, the Israelites, and their mortal enemies, the Amalekites. The Israelite soldiers under Joshua marched against the enemy, while Moses went to the top of a hill to pray. "As long as Moses held up his hands [in prayer], the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning" (Exodus 17:12). The soldiers on the ground could win only with air support from heaven. When Moses got too tired to hold up his hands, two other men supported him. "Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset" (17:13). That enabled God's people to defeat their enemies.

Victory depends on prayer. Why? Because victory depends on God. Jesus tells us, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The apostle Paul, who wrote Ephesians 6 and knew so much about spiritual warfare, knew that on his own, he didn't have what it took to carry out his mission. Paul said, "Our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5 KJV).

A man once asked Jesus' disciples to drive a demon out of his son. The disciples had already succeeded in driving out some other demons, but they were not able to drive this one out. Then Jesus came on the scene, and he succeeded in making the demon leave. Later, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:28-29).

That's true of many enemies we face and of many problems we have: *this kind can be dealt with only by prayer*. There may be some things we can deal with simply by using strength God has already given us, but some enemies are so strong that we need more power than we've received thus far. The way to get that power is prayer. When the enemy is too much for you, use your line of communication to call headquarters for more air support.

### **Praying for All the Saints**

Prayer is the line of supply and communication for each individual soldier of Christ, and remember: you're not the only soldier in the struggle. If you're a Christian, you're part of an army. You should care not just about yourself but about your fellow warriors in the struggle against Satan. What happens to any part of the church affects the whole church (1 Corinthians 12:26). If you succeed against Satan, it helps your fellow soldiers; if they succeed, it helps you. If you fail, it hurts their position; if they fail, it hurts you. The apostle Paul says, "Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:29). In the Lord's army, it's all for one, and one for all. So when you pray, don't just pray for yourself. Pray for all who are fighting for the Lord along with you. "Always keep on praying for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18) Don't just pray for your own congregation or denomination. Pray for the church of Jesus all around the world.

Sometimes, when someone is going through a time of terrible stress or suffering, they find it hard to pray. Their mind is spinning, their spirit is exhausted, and they've already prayed so much they feel prayed out. But even if they're so overwhelmed they can hardly pray, you can pray for them. A number of Christians who have gone through hard times have told me what a comfort it was to know that even when they couldn't pray, others were praying for

them, and God was hearing those prayers. Part of spiritual warfare is being alert not only to Satan's attacks on you but his attacks on others, and praying not only for yourself but for those who are facing the fiercest attacks.

When you pray for others, it's good for them, and it's good for you. One of the worst problems for many of us today is just plain self-centeredness. It's possible to be so focused on *my* health, *my* success, *my* looks, *my* reputation, *my* spiritual standing that it makes me sick in spirit. If all I think about is me, me, me, and if all I pray about is me, me, me, it makes me spiritually unhealthy. Many individuals and churches could get beyond petty problems if only they would recognize the huge threat of Satan, trust the power of God, and pray for each other and for all the saints and for the advance of God's kingdom, rather than centering on themselves.

Pray for all the saints. Pray for young Christians who are surrounded by more temptations than any generation of youth in history. Pray for Christian parents who aren't sure they're up to the challenge of bringing up children. Pray for single Christians who struggle with loneliness. Pray for middle-aged Christians who wonder if their life counts for much. Pray for elderly Christians who are in failing health and may face cruel demonic attacks of doubt and fear as death comes closer.

Pray for all the saints. Pray for Christian teachers who mentor children. Pray for Christians in business who struggle to be honest. Pray for Christian farmers and factory workers, Christian lawyers, doctors, and other professionals, who struggle to apply their faith to their profession. Pray for all Christians everywhere who must shine for Christ while fighting off Satan's attacks.

Pray for all the saints, especially for those who are persecuted or in prison. The Bible says, "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (He-

brews 13:3). Many persecuted Christians say that this is what they want most: to be remembered, to be prayed for, to know that they are not abandoned by God or forgotten by fellow believers.

### **Praying for Church Leaders**

Please pray also for pastors and missionaries. When Paul told the Ephesians to pray for all the saints, he added, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (6:19-20). If this mighty man of God asked people to pray for him, then surely your pastor needs your prayers. Other Christian leaders need your prayers. A preacher's effectiveness doesn't depend just on his talent or even on his own prayers but on the prayers of his people. Someone once asked British preacher Charles Spurgeon the secret of his success in winning so many thousands to Christ. Spurgeon replied, "My people pray for me."

What should you pray for? What should you ask God to do for preachers and leaders? Pray that God will give them a message and the boldness to speak that message clearly. That's what Paul wanted. He was in prison, but he didn't ask the Ephesians to pray for his freedom. He was in poor health, but he didn't ask them to pray that he would thrive and prosper. Paul asked them to pray that he would be able to proclaim Christ fearlessly.

I always feel encouraged when someone says, "I pray for you." Like Paul, I especially appreciate prayers that God will give me words and make me fearless. Do you know how hard it can be for a preacher to prepare a message and to come up with the right words? Do you know how hard it is to be bold? I'm timid by nature. Boldness doesn't come naturally to me. I like to get along with people. I don't like to offend anyone. And yet if I speak God's



message, some will be offended. I need prayers that I will be free from worry about human opinion and simply speak God's message boldly, whatever the reaction might be.

For some pastors, it's more dangerous to be bold than it is for me. Some may have their freedom and life endangered if government officials oppose their message. Others may have their income and position endangered if a wealthy member of their congregation is offended and wants the pastor out and withholds money. Other pastors may just get so worn down in spirit that they run out of lively words and have no energy left to be bold. When they get up and preach, it's because they have to say something, not because they have something to say. They need words from God and boldness from God. Their own prayer life may get dangerously weak, but if fellow believers stand with them and pray for them, the Lord can make them strong and bold again.

The church desperately needs pastors and leaders who preach God's Word plainly and send his battle signal loud and clear. "If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8). So pray for preachers. Pray that they will have boldness to sound God's trumpet! Pray that they will speak the truth as they should: fearlessly, truthfully, lovingly, and effectively.

We're in a war. Satan and his evil forces are trying to destroy us. So be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the full armor of God. Use the ultimate weapon against Satan, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And don't neglect your lines of supply and communication. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

### *Epilogue*

## **A Winning Spirit**

*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7)*

In spiritual warfare, you need the heart of an eagle, not the heart of a chicken. Eagles are bold and strong and soar in the heavens. "Chicken" is the nickname you get if you're timid and cowardly. Chickens don't soar. They weigh too much. Worry and fear make them too heavy to fly upward. But if you're a daring eagle, your spirit is lighter and your wings are stronger. If you want to soar to new levels, be an eagle, not a chicken. A chicken has a losing spirit; an eagle has a winning spirit. What does a winning spirit have that a losing spirit lacks? At least three things: power, love, and self-control.

First, a winning spirit has *power*, while a losing spirit doesn't. A losing spirit feels like a victim. Everything seems to be against you, and you don't have the strength to deal with it. A losing spirit expects to fail. But a winning spirit expects to succeed. A winning spirit may face big challenges, but it draws on a source of inner strength more powerful than anything that is against you. It's a spirit of power.

Second, a winning spirit has *love*; a losing spirit lacks it. A losing spirit feels forsaken, lonely, mistreated, unloved. Feeling so unloved, a losing spirit can't give love in a healthy way or build solid relationships. A winning spirit, on the other hand, feels cherished, embraced, blessed,

loved. A winning spirit—secure in being loved with enormous, unending love—is eager to expand the circle of love and builds loving, flourishing relationships with others. It’s a spirit of love.

Third, a winning spirit has *self-control*; a losing spirit feels out of control. A losing spirit feels dominated by unchangeable situations and uncontrollable urges, panicking or acting foolishly on impulse or behaving rashly. A winning spirit can handle any challenge with a sense of calm and purpose. It keeps a level head and makes choices based on what’s best, not based on panic or impulse. It’s a spirit of self-control.

Are you an eagle with a winning spirit of power, love, and self-control? Or are you a chicken with a losing spirit? It’s no fun to have that chicken feeling, and it’s not how you’re meant to live. Maybe you feel stuck with a losing spirit. How can you get rid of it? How can you have a winning spirit instead? Well, don’t just try to think positive. Don’t just work on being a little braver or having a brighter outlook. Trying to give yourself a winning spirit won’t work. If you’re a chicken, it won’t help much to decide that from now on you are going to fly high in the sky. Chickens can flap their wings and even get off the ground for a few moments, but they always come back down with a thud. If you’re a chicken, you can try to fly, you can try to change your attitude and make yourself into the person you want to be, but do-it-yourself efforts to make a losing spirit act like a winning spirit end with a thud.

If you want a winning spirit, don’t depend on your own weak spirit. We’re all chickens at heart. The sooner we admit it, the better. We lack power. We lack love. We lack self-control. To soar like an eagle, we need to give up on our own timid spirit and seek a spirit greater than our own, the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says that in our own power, even the strongest of us eventually stumble and run out of energy, “but those who hope in the

Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).

You need to have God’s Holy Spirit in you, and you need to be aware of the transforming effect he has on your spirit. “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7).

### **Spirit of Power**

In order to have a winning spirit like an eagle, you need power: power to deal with challenges, power to overcome discouragement, power to resist temptation, power to handle any situation life throws at you. You need power not just to survive but to thrive, not just to defend yourself but to go on the offensive and move forward. To win in spiritual warfare, you need the kind of power the apostle Paul spoke of when he said, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

An eagle’s winning spirit exclaims, “I can do everything!” But a chicken’s losing spirit moans, “I can’t do anything.” It’s awful to have a victim mentality. The victim mentality comes in many forms. You were abused as a child, so you’re worthless and will never amount to anything. Or you’ve plunged into drinking and drugs, and nothing can break your addiction. Or your marriage and family life is a mess, and there’s no way you’ll ever enjoy positive, joyful relationships. Or you’ve lost your job, and you don’t have what it takes to succeed in today’s world. Or you’ve done something so awful that God can’t possibly forgive you or love you. You’re dirt. You’re helpless. You’re hopeless. What’s the use of trying to move ahead? You’re going to fail anyway. You’re just a chicken headed for slaughter.

I hear various people who talk that way. I hear defeat in their voices. I see despair in their eyes. As they tell of their troubles and how grim the future looks, it makes me

sad, and it makes me mad. It makes me sad that they feel so hopeless, and it makes me mad that Satan has been lying to them.

Satan wants us to think that there's no way to overcome the forces that are against us. Satan wants us to believe that sin, sadness, failure, and death are all that the future holds. But Satan is a liar! He wants you to feel helpless and to think there's no way you can win. But that's a lie.

The truth is this. Satan doesn't have a chance against the power of God. Satan is stronger than we are on our own, but Satan and all his demons combined have no chance against even one person who has the power of God's Holy Spirit. The only way Satan can keep you down is to feed you lies.

Satan may start by telling you the lie that you can do just fine on your own without God. You feel smart, strong, and sure to succeed. Who needs God? But at some point, that lie usually gets exposed. Your life starts crumbling. It becomes obvious that you can't make it on your own. At that point, Satan switches to a new lie. He says you're a loser, you'll always be a loser, you have no chance to ever be anything or do anything. Just accept that you're a chicken doomed to be devoured.

Satan tries to bury you in such lies so that you won't focus on the fact that God is far more powerful than Satan and so that you'll never connect with God's power through faith. The moment you start believing in God's power and sense his power at work in you, Satan hasn't got a chance. Satan trying to beat God is like a mosquito trying to beat a tiger. By faith in God's power, you can walk all over Satan (Romans 16:20), and he knows it. Nothing frightens the devil more than faith. The devil trembles every time a person rejects his lies, believes in the almighty strength of the living God, and stands against Satan by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you put your faith in Jesus and have the Holy Spirit living in you, then you have power inside you greater than any power in all the world, greater than the power of Satan himself. The Bible says to Christians, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). How can you put God's power into action in your fight against Satan? By faith. By faith reject Satan's lies. By faith believe God's truth in Christ. "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4-5).

Faith is the way to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and faith is also the way to defeat Satan and his schemes.

Faith in Jesus is the pipeline through which the power of the Holy Spirit flows. The Holy Spirit's power is the very same power by which Jesus did his miracles. Jesus preached the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus cast out demons in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus made lame people walk and paralyzed people dance by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus even raised dead people to life by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it was the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus himself from the grave and gave him the decisive victory over death, sin, and Satan.

All these miracles were astonishing, but just as astonishing is the miracle Christ does every time he takes a soul dead in sin and brings it to life by his Spirit. Still today the Holy Spirit drives out demons and sets people free from Satan. Still today the Holy Spirit smashes barriers and brings healing and wholeness. Still today the Holy Spirit fills individuals and transforms families. Still today the Spirit transforms earthbound chickens into soaring eagles.

Still today the Holy Spirit brings the resurrection power of Christ into the lives of ordinary people.

Jesus Christ has almighty power, and that same power is in our hearts if we have his Holy Spirit living in us. Some religions are mostly rituals and words without life or power, but real faith in the living Lord Jesus is much more than that. “The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (1 Corinthians 4:20).

This power is a great protection. If you trust the risen Christ and have his Spirit living in you, then you “by faith are shielded by God’s power” (1 Peter 1:5). This shield isn’t just something you have; it is something you must use. “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16).

You’re not just up against unpleasant things or vague forces. You are up against personal, hateful spirits of wickedness, led by Satan himself. Satan will keep shooting fiery darts at you, but don’t be afraid. Faith is fireproof. With every new attack of Satan, take up your faith afresh. You will be shielded by God’s power from whatever Satan does. The devil wants you to think he can’t be beat, but the Holy Spirit inside you is greater than the devil outside you. Faith will give you victory even if Satan and the whole world are against you.

All of us need this encouragement, even Christian leaders—especially Christian leaders! No one faces fiercer attacks from Satan than those of us who have a special calling to lead others in faith. We can get discouraged about our own sins and limited abilities. We can get disappointed by a church that seems stuck in a rut or a community that doesn’t seem responsive to the gospel. We can get disheartened by results that fall short of our hopes. We can get disoriented and deceived by sly lies that Satan tells through scholars who deny or distort the Bible. We can become doubtful, timid, tired. We can wonder why we’re

in the ministry at all. We can wonder whether there’s any point in following Jesus.

But, fellow leader, don’t give up! Don’t be afraid! “The Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7 TEV). Those words from God were first given to encourage a *pastor*. Young pastor Timothy tended to be timid, so the apostle Paul encouraged him. We leaders need to encourage each other and remind each other what sort of Spirit God has given us—not a timid spirit, but the mighty Holy Spirit of Christ himself.

If you’re a Christian and have the Holy Spirit living in you, then be bold! Be strong! Be courageous! Be fiercely glad! Don’t let Satan’s attacks get you down. Every new attack you face is an opportunity to win another victory. When Satan attacks you, attack right back. Don’t let his attacks frighten you. Let them gladden you. If Satan is firing volley after volley of flaming arrows at you, it means he’s worried about you. You’re a threat to him. Be glad about that.

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Fight in the Spirit’s power, and you will win. Satan wants to scare you with the lie that he’s winning, but the truth is that he’s already lost. Christ is on the throne, and he gives believers the Spirit of power.

### **Spirit of Love**

Along with power, another life-changing blessing of the Holy Spirit is love. Nothing in all the world matters so much as knowing you are loved and being able to love others. The Bible says those who trust Christ are able to rejoice even in troubles and have bright hope for the future, “because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5).

God showed his great love in sending his Son, Jesus, to die for us while we were still ungodly sinners and enemies



of the Lord (Romans 5:8). Jesus' death on the cross was a once-for-all payment more than sufficient to cover the sins of the world. If God loved us so much when we were enemies fighting against him, what can stop him from loving us once he has made us his friends? One of the main works of the Holy Spirit is simply to seal God's love on our hearts.

I am amazed anew every time I see the change that occurs in people who really begin to know in their hearts that God loves them. Their hard and rebellious exterior softens and melts. Their sense of being rotten and unlovable gives way to the joy and warmth of being treasured by God. Self-destructive addictions and suicidal thoughts begin to shrink and a new will to live takes over. In some cases the change is sudden and striking. In other cases it occurs over a period of time, with many ups and downs. But the change is unmistakable. The love of God may pour in with a rush, or it may trickle in slowly and secretly, but the result is the same: a heart filled with God's love.

Once the love of God flows into you, God's love also begins to flow from you to others. I have seen women who were once wicked become some of the most faithful wives and tender mothers I know, thanks to God's love. I have seen men who were harsh and selfish become caring husbands and wise, affectionate fathers, thanks to God's love. I have seen couples on the verge of divorce renewed in love for each other after God's love came into their lives, thanks to God's love. I have seen slaves of drugs and alcohol set free and made active in bringing freedom to others, thanks to God's love. I have seen greedy, hard-hearted workaholics become kind and generous, thanks to God's love. I have seen suicidal, hateful teens become hopeful and helpful, thanks to God's love. I have seen criminals who grew up in loveless homes and did dreadful deeds become eager to rescue others from Satan's hate and lies, thanks to God's love. Nothing is more deadly than to be a

hater who feels hated, and nothing is more life-changing than to be a lover who feels loved.

Sometimes, though, even followers of Jesus forget how much they are loved and may fail to love others. They become fearful in their own hearts and harsh in their attitudes toward others. The Bible tells of a time when a village didn't welcome Jesus and his disciples because of racial and political prejudice. That made Jesus' followers furious. "When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village" (John 9:45-56).

Some ancient Bible manuscripts say that when Jesus rebuked them, he said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." If you want God to blast your enemies instantly, you're not in tune with the Holy Spirit of Christ. He's not the Spirit of hatred and instant payback; he's the Spirit of love, patience, and another chance.

If that's not our attitude toward others, if we have a harsh and vengeful attitude toward them, it may mean that we ourselves aren't yet feeling secure in God's love. "Righteous anger" can be a mask for inner anguish. A cold, cruel attitude toward others may flow from a lack of faith in God's love for us. Even if we belong to him, we may still lack full assurance and experience of his love, and that can poison our behavior toward others and rob us of the joy God wants us to have. The Bible says repeatedly that the Holy Spirit replaces fear with love. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:14-16).

Do you know in your spirit that you are a dearly loved child of God because of Jesus Christ? Has the Holy Spirit flooded your heart with so much of God's love that fear has been forced out? You will feel like a chicken, a loser, as long as you fear that nobody really loves you—at least nobody who knows what you are really like. But if you know that God loves you fully and forever, even though he knows every bad thing you've done and the evil that still lurks in your heart, then God's love gives you a winning spirit, a spirit that soars on eagle's wings.

### **Spirit of Self-Control**

A third blessing of the Holy Spirit, along with power and love, is self-control. In fact, power and love are the key to self-control.

The Spirit's power builds self-control by preventing you from panicking and losing control in the face of things that are happening around you. Knowing you have inner power to win, you stay calm at the center and enjoy peace that surpasses understanding. You master the situation; the situation doesn't master you. God's power enables you to control yourself.

The Spirit's love builds self-control by giving you a sound mind, a healthy realism, a stable personality. Out-of-control people are often driven by hatred or by a desperate craving for love that has never been satisfied. Serious lack of self-control appears in various forms—alcoholism, drug addiction, eating problems, sexual compulsions, obsession with work, inability to control anger—but whatever the form, these problems usually arise in a spirit starved for love. Once that craving is satisfied by the Holy Spirit pouring God's love into your heart, the old urges no longer dominate. God's love puts you in your right mind and gives you self-control.

Do you have a winning spirit? Do you have the power, love, and self-control that enable you to soar like an eagle? Only the Holy Spirit can make that a reality for you. Only the Spirit can get you off the ground, and only the Spirit can keep you soaring. As the Bible puts it, "this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-control. Only in the Spirit's strength can you follow Jesus to victory over the devil, the world, and the flesh. So be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might!

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