

THE

STRUGGLE

IS

REAL

TABLE OF

CONTENTS

SESSION	1 WE ARM OURSELVES FOR BATTLE	1
	2 WE FIGHT FROM OUR VICTORY	8
	3 WE UNDERSTAND OUR ENEMY	14
	4 WE DEMOLISH OUR STRONGHOLDS	21

WE ARM

OURSELVES

FOR BATTLE

SESSION 1

LEADER NOTE

This section is about introducing the overall topic and giving an overview of the concepts we'll discuss. Highlight the topics that will be covered in the series, but be careful not to go into great detail, because you'll do that in the next few weeks. This is simply an introduction to the main elements of the series. Also, this is a perfect opportunity to emphasize that "The Struggle is Real" is a 4-week study. "We Arm Ourselves for Battle" is only the first week, but each idea is a big part of understanding the spiritual struggle we all face—and how to face it well.

WE ARM OURSELVES FOR BATTLE

We have a very real enemy with whom we are at war. Whether we realize it or not, the devil is working to destroy God's people and defame God's glory. The struggle is real, and we must take up the spiritual equipment God has given us as we pray for Him to empower us to faithfully stand and fight.

WE FIGHT FROM OUR VICTORY

From the beginning of time, the Victor in this struggle has been certain. We know how the battle will end. In the meantime, we have the responsibility and privilege of fighting from the place of victory we know has already come, and is coming again once and for all. We do that when we walk with the Lord daily, resisting the pull of worldliness and sin in our lives.

WE UNDERSTAND OUR ENEMY

As we fight from the place of victory, Satan fights with great venom. He cannot achieve ultimate victory in the lives of those who belong to Jesus, but he can rob us of abundant life in the here and now. We must be aware of his schemes to steal our understanding, kill our joy, and destroy our purpose.

WE DEMOLISH OUR STRONGHOLDS

During His earthly ministry, Jesus battled demonic forces and addressed demonic strongholds. Since the Bible teaches Satan will be more active in the last days, we should expect to regularly battle demonic forces and strongholds, too. To do that, we must define strongholds, describe our particular strongholds, and demolish strongholds through faith in God, whose victorious power is at work in you.

WE HAVE SPIRITUAL ENEMIES

LEADER NOTE

In this section, we want to help people identify their spiritual enemies, and then know how God has equipped and empowered them to stand firm against those enemies. It is important to help adults find a healthy Scriptural view of spiritual warfare—some assign the devil more power than he has, and God too little, while others ignore the devil's schemes altogether. As you discuss, keep in mind that your group likely consists of both types of people.

Pastor Grant said, "The church is not a cruise ship, but a battleship." Which of those two ships best describes how you typically approach the Christian life? Explain.

KEY VERSES

EPHESIANS 6:10-12

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh

and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Since such a great spiritual battle is taking place, what are some reasons Christians live as though unaware or unconcerned? Why do we need to be reminded there are spiritual forces of evil working against us?

How have you seen the truth of Ephesians 6:10-12 at work in your own life?

Notice Paul didn't give the Ephesian believers a pep talk. He didn't say, "You've got this!" The fact is, even the most faithful believers among us don't have what it takes to best the devil and his schemes. In and of ourselves, we'll lose every time. But just as certain as the forces of spiritual darkness are against us, the matchless power of God is working through us and for us.

WE HAVE SPIRITUAL EQUIPMENT

KEY VERSES

EPHESIANS 6:13-17

¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness

given by the Gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

What words and phrases did Paul use to express the actions believers must take?

Is taking up the armor of God something you can decide to do one day, something that happens over time, or both? Have you ever thought you were armed for battle, but still fell prey to Satan's schemes? How does that happen?

We don't need to brainstorm ways we can battle evil. We don't need to work out in the gym or get someone who does work out a lot to take on Satan. Remember even our best efforts, on our very best day, won't be enough to beat him. But God has provided everything we need to win. We are to ready ourselves and stand with complete faith in His truth, righteousness, peace, and salvation.

KEY VERSE

HEBREWS 4:12

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow,

and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 speaks to the piercing nature of God's Word in the life of the believer, while Ephesians 6:17 speaks to the offensive nature of God's Word as a tool for the believer to use in spiritual battle.

How are these two uses of God's Word related?

What steps can you take to better utilize God's Word as your offensive weapon for fighting spiritual battles?

When you allow God's Word to work in your heart, you're allowing God to fight spiritual battles already taking place within you, and you're proactively sharpening your focus for the spiritual battles you'll face in the future. In other words, God's Word illuminates the sin in our hearts, and it also illuminates who we are in Christ when Satan tries to deceive us.

WE HAVE SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT

KEY VERSES

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

¹⁸...Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul was a bold guy. He stood before earthly rulers and authorities that could have put him to death for preaching the name of Jesus, and he proclaimed the Gospel anyway. If someone like Paul needed to pray all the time, and in particular for boldness to verbalize his faith, the rest of us certainly do, too! Pastor Grant put it this way: "If you're not praying, you're probably straying."

Thinking back to Ephesians 6:12, why do we need to pray at all times in the Spirit?

Think about the types of requests you typically make in prayer. **Do those requests demonstrate a belief that your struggle is against flesh and blood, or against the spiritual forces of evil?**

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD ARMING YOURSELF FOR BATTLE

LEADER NOTE

Regardless of where a person is in his or her spiritual life, everyone has a next step to take. Use this time to help learners personally apply biblical truths to their lives and commit to follow Jesus in greater obedience. Emphasize that the first steps, of acknowledging there is a battle going on and turning to Jesus in faith, must precede any other step for true victory to take place in the struggle.

BELIEVE THERE IS A BATTLE GOING ON

If you think there's not, Satan has already accomplished at least one of his goals in your life. Do you recognize your inability to stand firm in your own power, or do you think you are "above" certain sins?

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

Without Christ in you, you're fighting a losing battle. Have you put your faith in Jesus and surrendered to Him as Lord?

GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

You are not meant to fight alone (Eph. 6:18). Are you daily walking with the Lord? Are you fully engaged in Christian community?

DON'T GO INTO BATTLE WITHOUT YOUR ARMOR AND SWORD

The struggle is spiritual, and must be fought with spiritual weapons. **Are you taking steps to arm yourself daily with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the readiness given by the Gospel of peace? Are you taking up the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation? Are you using your sword, God's Word, daily, or is it sitting on the shelf?**

PRAY FOR BOLDNESS

God's Spirit led Jesus right into the wilderness, knowing fully that Satan and his temptations would be waiting (Matt. 4:1). Our call is not to avoid the battle; it is to engage in it. **Do you pray for opportunities to boldly demonstrate God's power and glory to the lost world around you?**

Which of these steps is the Holy Spirit urging you to take so that you can stand more firmly than before as you face your very real struggles in the days ahead?

COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

6:10 Paul's concluding teaching challenged believers to recognize their spiritual weaknesses and to draw on the Lord. We cannot strengthen ourselves. We need power from outside. The Lord Jesus is the One who supplies spiritual strength. Paul had already used the phrase "His vast strength" in Ephesians 1:19 to refer to God's active power in the lives of believers.

6:11-12 The full armor of God is required not only because we are weak but also because our spiritual enemies are strong. Our strongest adversary is the devil. We should never doubt that the devil is a real, supernatural person. He opposes God and His people with tactics, a term suggesting how wily he is. The believer's responsibility, once clad in God-given armor, is to stand. We need not flee the devil, but we are to boldly hold the fortress of our own souls. We do not face a physical army (flesh and blood human beings). We face a spiritual army. Paul listed some of these evil beings. There is a hierarchy of evil spirit-beings in hostile opposition to God and His people.

6:13 For the second time, the apostle urged believers to use the full armor of God—the complete kit of spiritual equipment. God, the heavenly Warrior-King wears such armor (Isa. 59:17). He has now shared it with His people. In this verse, the verb "take up" is parallel to "put on" in verse 11. Both verbs suggest intentional action. To resist in the evil day means during the days until Christ's return as the conquering King.

6:14-15 Paul likened the three pieces of equipment Roman soldiers put on at the beginning of a day to God-given character traits we believers are to build daily into our lives.

Belt. This wide leather strap kept a Roman soldier's undergarments from getting tangled and also held his sword at the side of his body. By application, the belt stands for truth. Many Bible students believe this refers to a Christian's sincerity or integrity of speech. For believers to lapse into intrigue or dishonesty is to fall into the devil's own game.

Armor on your chest. The metal breastplate was standard for a battle soldier; it protected his vital organs during combat. For the believer, it stands for righteousness. Since Paul had Isaiah 59:17 in mind, he meant uprightness of character (godliness or Christlikeness). To neglect developing our character according to God's standard of virtue is to give the devil a gaping hole through which he may attack us.

Feet sandaled. The Roman soldier's hobnailed (cleated) shoes kept his feet from slipping. In the analogy, it stands for a Christian's readiness for the Gospel of peace. The meaning is probably the steadiness that comes to us because we have received the good news of Christ. Without assurance that we have peace with God through the Gospel, the devil will gain a great advantage, throwing us into doubts of all kinds.

6:16-17 Paul went on to speak about three more pieces of equipment. Understanding these pieces shows us actions we can take when we face spiritual battles.

Shield. The Roman shield Paul had in mind was probably a long, oblong leather-covered device that covered much of the body during active battle. It was effective at dousing flaming arrows. In the analogy, this stands for a believer's faith—active day-to-day trust in God to provide the strength to resist onslaughts that the evil one sends. Faith looks to the power of God when there is temptation.

Helmet. The soldier's metal headgear provided both protection and decoration. Paul had written to the Thessalonians to put on "a helmet of the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). So what is the salvation Paul had in mind? He probably meant our hope or expectation of future deliverance when we receive full salvation at last. Confidence that we will be with Christ forever and that we will enjoy a future resurrection with Him provides believers strength to endure all devilish assaults.

Sword. The Roman short sword was used for both defense and offense. It was efficient in hand-to-hand combat. It stands for God's Word. On the one hand, this refers to the entirety of the Scriptures, which has been inspired by the Spirit and is His gift to God's people. On the other hand, it refers to the specific biblical message that is apt for the need at hand. (Ps. 119:11; Heb. 4:12).

6:18 Four times in this verse Paul used Greek forms for "all" or "every."

All kinds of prayer. There is more than one way to talk to God. Here, the apostle used both a general term (prayer) and a specific term (request).

All times of prayer. There is no wrong time to pray! Morning prayers, mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, and battle-time prayers are all acceptable. Yet they are to be motivated by the Spirit, not just become a ritual or something perfunctory. Believers are to stay alert in prayer.

All perseverance in prayer. Prayer is to be continual. Jesus Himself made this clear in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

All objects of prayer. Believers should pray for each other—all the saints—knowing that they are also experiencing spiritual warfare in their own lives.

6:19-20 Paul wanted the Ephesians to include him in their prayers. He too was engaged in spiritual battle. Perhaps as a prisoner he was tempted to be silent about his faith. He did not ask to be set free; rather, he prayed for two qualities that would enable the ministry of the word to blaze forth. First, he wanted clarity. When he spoke, he wanted the right message to be given. Second, he wanted boldness, not shrinking from delivering what God had entrusted to him—which he recognized as the mystery of the Gospel. Earlier in the letter, Paul had called himself a "prisoner ... on behalf of you Gentiles" (3:1) and "the prisoner in the Lord" (4:1).

Now he called himself an ambassador in chains. As an ambassador, he was the accredited representative of Jesus Christ; and he would represent

Christ before the emperor's court. Even so great a Christian as Paul wanted prayer that he would be bold enough in Him to speak.

HEBREWS 4:12

In the larger context of this passage (3:7–4:13), the writer is warning against neglecting God's Word by failing to obey Him. He used the example of the exodus generation of Israelites. They refused to believe and obey God and therefore were not permitted to enter the promised land (3:18; 4:6). We must be faithful to hear and obey God's Word. The consequence of disobeying God's Word is judgment.

In the Greek text "living" is the first Word in verse 12, making it emphatic. The living God speaks His living Word. God's Word is not confined to a distant past but comes to us now with freshness, power, and clarity. That Word is effective or energetic, powerful. His Word causes things to happen. Additionally, the Word of God is active, an emphasis virtually identical in meaning with the term living. God's Word is not something we passively hear and then ignore.

It actively works in our lives, changes us, and sends us into action.

What did the writer mean by God's Word being a sharp two-edged sword that pierces into the depths of people's beings? One view is that he meant the Word's thoroughness. The living Word permeates every aspect of a person's being. It affects the whole person. A second view is that the sharp sword penetrates and divides the whole person similar to the way a surgeon's scalpel lays bare the organs inside a person. This view emphasizes judgment. God's Word judges the ideas and thoughts of the heart. It reaches into the center of a person's being and correctly perceives motives and intentions.

In light of verses 12-13, the latter interpretation seems to be the writer's meaning. He well may have meant that God's Word lay bare in the Hebrew believers any faithlessness, disobedience, and indifference or complacency in advancing toward spiritual maturity.

WE FIGHT

FROM OUR

VICTORY

SESSION 2

LEADER NOTE

This section is a way to briefly review last week before getting into today's lesson. Please be careful to keep it brief. We don't need to re-teach last week's lesson; we want to help learners see how this lesson is related to the one before it.

WE HAVE SPIRITUAL ENEMIES

In last week's session, we learned that we have a very real enemy with whom we are at war. Whether we realize it or not, the devil is working to destroy God's people and defame God's glory. The struggle is real, and we must take up the spiritual equipment God has given us as we pray for Him to empower us to faithfully stand and fight.

Name one takeaway from last week that stayed with you throughout the week.

Which piece of the armor of God did you recognize as especially valuable to you in the specific situations you faced this week?

Knowing we have spiritual enemies and how God has equipped us to face them is a first step. This week, we'll examine the perspective and attitude from which we endure the struggles we face. Ultimately, Jesus has already won the war. We must recognize we're not fighting to win; we're fighting because we have already won!

THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE

LEADER NOTE

These verses use strong imagery. Take your time reading the Scriptures, and let a familiar verse like 1 Peter 5:8 be examined with fresh insight. Consider showing a short video on a laptop or tablet of a roaring lion in the wild and on the prowl. Invite learners to consider Satan's hunger for their souls and Jesus' saving work on their behalf.

Pastor Grant related an umbrella to the different pieces of God's armor listed in Ephesians 6 in this way: An umbrella does not stop the rain. It stops the rain from stopping you! As long as we live on this sin-cursed earth, the struggle will continue to be real. So what should you do? Put on Jesus. The victory is in Jesus.

From the six statements about Jesus related to the armor of God—Jesus is the truth; Jesus is our righteousness; Jesus is our peace; Jesus is the object of our faith; Jesus is our salvation; Jesus is the Word that became flesh—choose one of those truths and identify how it stops the enemy from “stopping you.”

KEY VERSES

1 PETER 5:8

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

ISAIAH 14:12-15

¹² “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said

in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”

List every descriptor of Satan you find in these verses.

Does understanding your enemy give you courage or instill fear? Explain.

Satan has goals. He intends to accomplish them, too. Among those goals are your destruction and his exaltation. But this shouldn't impart fear in our hearts—it should compel us to courageously stand up under his schemes, because we know what he's planning and we know the Spirit of God who equips us for it.

THE ENDING OF THE STRUGGLE

KEY VERSES

1 PETER 5:10-11

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore,

confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

How will your struggle end?

Which of the following promises is most encouraging to you right now: you will be restored, you will be confirmed, you will be strengthened, you will be established, or you will receive eternal glory? Explain.

It is not simply that the struggle will end, though that is happy news. Your struggle will end with your restoration. Jesus will restore all things, and evil, death, and suffering will cease to exist. Your struggle will also end with your being established as a citizen of Christ's eternal glory in the heavenlies. It will end with your confirmation (see Matthew 25:23). It will end with your being strengthened. We won't limp around in heaven because of the wounds we have received on earth.

KEY VERSE

REVELATION 11:15

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

How does it impact the way you face your struggles to know that, in the end, victory is already yours?

Pastor Grant used the illustration of a pre-recorded football game. It does not matter how bad the struggle becomes, because in the end you already know the outcome! Revelation 11:15 assures us of the outcome: Jesus takes down the kingdoms of this world and reigns forever and ever.

What situation in your life do you need to start fighting from victory and not for victory? What would it look like for you to do that?

THE WINNING OF THE STRUGGLE

KEY VERSE

1 PETER 5:9

⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

What are some ways Christians around the world suffer that you do not? How does this fact make you feel? Should it impact the way you respond to the struggle? How so?

In what ways are all of our sufferings the "same"?

It's like when an injured quarterback limps onto the field to throw the final touchdown pass and win the game. That kind of commitment inspires other players to give more and do more. We are the body of Christ, and when we resist our enemy and remain steadfast in our struggle, it encourages other members of Christ's body to do the same. It might look different while some endure more severe suffering, but we're all on the same battlefield, fighting the same struggle and enemy.

KEY VERSE

1 JOHN 2:15-16

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

In your own words, what did John mean when he wrote, “Do not love the world or the things in the world”?

Why is it impossible to love God and also love the world? What do you do to counter the temptations of your flesh, eyes, and pride?

Pastor Grant pointed out that the way to see the world, or culture, is that it is structurally good and directionally wrong. He explained, “God made it structurally and directionally good. The fall caused it to be directionally bad.” But that isn’t the end of the story. Jesus came to redeem, and those whom He has redeemed are to be salt and light in the world.

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD FIGHTING FROM VICTORY

LEADER NOTE

This lesson brings up a variety of issues for every person, and each one has a next step to take. Use this time to help learners personally apply biblical truths to their lives and commit to follow Jesus in greater obedience. Emphasize that love of the world correlates with fighting for victory, while love of the Father correlates with fighting from victory.

BE WATCHFUL (1 PETER 5:8).

God has informed us of Satan’s schemes. Here are some practical ways you can remain watchful.

- Study Scripture. It is the only way to know the truth about who God is, who you are, and how to respond to the struggle we all face.
- Engage in Christian community. Going to church once a week isn’t enough. You must engage in relationships with other believers so that you have people to hold you accountable when the enemy tempts you with his schemes.
- Pray. When you regularly come before the Lord in prayer, the Holy Spirit alerts your heart to areas of sinfulness you wouldn’t otherwise notice.

BE FAITH-FULL (1 PETER 5:10-11).

That’s faith-full in the sense that you are full of faith that you are, indeed, fighting from victory, not for it.

- Memorize Scripture. God’s Word counters the lies the world throws at you. When it feels like your situation is hopeless, verses like 1 Peter 5:10-11 end the debate.
- Rest in God’s grace. You don’t have to work for the win. Jesus already did the work for us on the cross. Neither do you have anything to prove—you only have to stand firm (Eph. 6:10).

BE COURAGEOUS (1 PETER 5:9).

- Get informed. It's difficult to be encouraged by the suffering of other believers if you pay them no attention. Find out what is happening around the world and pray for believers who follow Jesus in places where persecution is intense.
- Confess your sins. Love for the world is stopped dead in its tracks the moment we acknowledge it as sin. Don't let culture tell you what is right and wrong. Follow Jesus' example and confess it when you miss the mark.
- Practice repentance. Some people think it is enough to do whatever they want as long as they ask God for forgiveness later. This is the wrong attitude. Jesus calls us to repentance. It is impossible to remain steadfast and resist the devil if we do not humbly change our direction when we find ourselves on the wrong path.

COMMENTARY

1 PETER 5:8-11

5:8-9. Peter warned believers to be aware of Satan's deceitful practices and to resist him firmly. Such behavior is fitting for temporary residents of this world. Peter strengthened his readers with the knowledge that other Christians were also suffering.

5:10-11. God will strengthen and honor in heaven those who endure suffering for their faith while on earth.

ISAIAH 14:12-15

Commentators have often connected this passage to Lk 10:18 and Rev 12:8-9, but the context seems clear that the one fallen from the heavens is not Satan (even though the KJV translated "shining morning star" as "Lucifer"), but is instead the Babylonian king. If there is a double application the Bible never indicates as much. The poetic theme of this passage may be modeled on the Canaanite account of a lesser god that tried to usurp the position of the high God. Such pride resulted in a quick and horrible fall.

REVELATION 11:15-16

The phrase "the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah" can be understood as (1) the earthly reign of Christ (20:4-6) has already begun at this point, and chapters 12-19 is a déjà vu of the first half of the book, until the narrative

arrives at another description of "the kingdom of our Lord over this world," in 20:4-6; (2) the past tense "has become" speaks of certainty so strong that the future is spoken of in the past tense (i.e., "will certainly become"); (3) what is already true in heaven will come true on earth ("Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Mt 6:10); or (4) the timeless perspective of heaven is different from that of this world (e.g., from the standpoint of heaven, "every creature" in the universe blesses God and the Lamb in Rev 5:13, long before "every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [Php 2:10-11] at the final judgment [Rev 20:11-15]). Any of the last three explanations is more likely than the first.

1 JOHN 2:15

2:15. Things that belong to the world are not just material objects. They are things that absorb human love for the Father to an undue degree, even to the point of supplanting God.

2:16. John warned against what the body desires, what the eyes itch to see, and what people work hard to acquire. These are not from the Father but from the world.

WE

UNDERSTAND

OUR ENEMY

SESSION 3

LEADER NOTE

This section is a way to briefly review last week before getting into today's lesson. Please be careful to keep it brief. We don't need to re-teach last week's lesson; we want to help learners see how this lesson is related to the one before it.

WE FIGHT FROM OUR VICTORY

Read Ephesians 6:12 together again:

EPHESIANS 6:12

¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

So far, we've learned that we have a very real enemy with whom we are at war. The devil is working to destroy God's people and defame God's glory. The struggle is real, and we must take up the spiritual equipment God has given us as we pray for Him to empower us to faithfully stand and fight.

We've also learned the perspective and attitude from which we endure the struggles we face. Ultimately, Jesus has already won the war. We must recognize we're not fighting to win; we're fighting because we have already won!

Would you say you lived from a place of victory or defeat this week?

Name one takeaway from last week that has stayed with you.

As we fight from the place of victory, Satan fights with great venom. He cannot achieve ultimate victory in the lives of those who belong to Jesus, but he can rob us of abundant life in the here and now. We must be aware of his schemes to steal our understanding, kill our joy, and destroy our purpose.

JOHN 10:10

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

STEAL YOUR UNDERSTANDING

KEY VERSES

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

ROMANS 12:2

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Pastor Grant said the number one area the devil works on is your thought life.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says that the devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers. **Can a believer's mind be blinded, too? In what way? How does that happen?**

Based on what you've learned about the enemy so far, what are some things he wants you to believe?

KEY VERSES

JOHN 10:4-9

⁴ "When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus

again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

From verse 9, what is one of the primary subjects about which Satan steals understanding?

Who is the only Source of abundant life? Have there been moments or seasons of your life where you thought there was another "door" to abundant life? What was that door? Where did it actually lead?

Pastor Grant explained, "You make wrong choices when you listen to wrong voices." There is only one door to salvation, one source of abundant life—Jesus. **Are you trusting in Him alone?**

KILL YOUR JOY

LEADER NOTE

This section is highly personal, relatable, and applicable to every learner. If you are transparent with the areas of your life where joy has been a struggle, they will be more apt to share honestly about theirs. To that end, as you prepare, answer every question you plan to ask the group. Then if needed, you'll be ready to get the ball rolling.

Name a circumstance or issue where doubt tends to kill your joy.

KEY VERSES

JOHN 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who

has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Why do you think Jesus was compelled to say, "No one will snatch them out of my hand"?

In this week's message, we learned that one of the devil's greatest tools is doubt. He cannot kill your salvation, so he wants to kill the joy of your salvation—he does this by messing with your mind.

KEY VERSE

ROMANS 8:1

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

How does this verse help you better understand why Satan is referred to as "the accuser" (Rev. 12:10)?

The devil will accuse you of not being good enough, righteous enough, forgiven enough. The crazy thing is we often believe him. And when we do, we cannot fight from a place of victory because we do not truly believe victory is ours yet. We think we still have to earn it somehow. This is absolutely contrary to the Gospel. Jesus freely gives eternal life. His grace is greater. It is enough.

DESTROY YOUR PURPOSE

KEY VERSES

Matthew 13:18-23

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of

the Word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the Word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Where in this passage do you see a description of a person who lacks purpose? Lacks joy?

Why does Satan make destroying your purpose a priority?

Verse 23 serves as a stark contrast to the types of people described in verses 19-22. The person who seeks to daily allow the Word of God to take root in his or her heart and mind experiences abundant life. This life is not something we happen upon; it is a gift of God's grace for anyone who refuses to allow the enemy to steal or choke out the life Jesus extends.

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD UNDERSTANDING YOUR ENEMY

LEADER NOTE

Encourage learners to take the next steps God is calling them to so that they might experience the abundant life Jesus came to give them. Use this time to help learners personally apply biblical truths to their lives and commit to follow Jesus in greater obedience. Emphasize there are only two choices—follow Jesus and experience abundant life, or listen to the enemy and allow him to steal, kill, and destroy.

In which of the three areas we discussed does Satan tend to have his way with you, if any: understanding, joy, or purpose? In light of our study, what is God saying to you about that area?

How can this group help you walk in the next step God is calling you to take in your faith journey with His Son, Jesus?

COMMENTARY

JOHN 10:4-10, 27-30

10:4-5. Not only do these sheep listen to the shepherd's voice, they know His voice. John seems to emphasize the point that they never leave the shepherd and never follow a stranger. But who is this stranger whom the sheep avoid? We do not want to put any dogmatic assignments on the particulars of this parable, but one thing is clear—the stranger is anyone other than the shepherd they know. Strangers abound in our day in a variety of religions and cults as well as the secular domain. Shouting for sheep to follow is common practice, but the Lord's true sheep pay no attention because they will never follow a stranger.

10:6. As in many of Jesus' parables, people did not understand the metaphor, at least until He explained its various components which we find later in the chapter. But one thing seems clear in this first paragraph: the sheep were dependent on their shepherd, whom they knew and trusted. Furthermore, the shepherd took full responsibility for the sheep, even though thieves and robbers constantly tried to break into the sheep pen and steal them. In this verse John uses the Greek Word *paroimia* (figure of speech), his preferred substitute for parable. The first never appears in the synoptic Gospels and the second never occurs in John, although he used *paroimia* again in 16:25, 29.

10:7-8. Verse 7 begins just like verse 1 in the Greek text—"amem, amen". Before Jesus actually identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, He described His activity at the sheep gate. We know from Luke 15 that a shepherd counts His sheep and from Psalm 23 how carefully He takes care of them. First-century listeners would have been certain to link this teaching with that familiar psalm. Jesus did not merely explain the first paragraph of the chapter but actually expanded it. New features are added such as the "hired hand" (v. 12) and the adjective "good" (v. 11). Thieves we have seen earlier, but the "wolf" (v. 12) is a new character and the insertion of the teacher into the narrative in the first person—I am the gate.

10:9-10. In addition to guarding the sheep, the Good Shepherd provides for them—unlike thieves who steal and kill and destroy. Throwing aside the metaphor to reveal spiritual truth, Jesus told the sheep that he had come to give life so they might live it to the full. False shepherds intend to injure the sheep, but that is never the behavior of the true shepherd. We need to watch carefully the flow between metaphor and spiritual reality here. In verse 9 Jesus is clearly talking about people as spiritual sheep, while verse 10 falls back into the metaphor at the beginning and then talks about spiritual life.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

Verse 4 helps us understand why Gospel proclamation and Christian ministry may appear "unsuccessful" at times. The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers. Satan was and is a clever, powerful deceiver. He made the false teachers and their distorted message appealing to many in Paul's day. Sadly, Satan continues to deceive many men and women today, so that they prefer spiritual darkness over the light of the Gospel.

ROMANS 8:1

"Therefore" is always a marker in Paul's writings that points back to a previous argument and sets the stage for the results about to be

described. In this case Paul wrote about the benefits of a Christians being freed from sin and death. In the Book of Romans Paul sought to answer a basic question: "How can people be righteous before God?" In Christ we have no condemnation. We do not need to fear rejection from God. No condemnation means we have no reason to live with guilt in the present. Paul added a new dimension to the definition of life in Christ Jesus with the Spirit's law. The law of the Spirit is responsible for breaking the hold of the law of sin and of death. This law enslaved and led to death. The Spirit is freeing and life-giving.

ROMANS 12:2

As Christians, we're also to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of the age, to adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship (sin). The apostle urged his readers to reject worldliness and to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, life-long endeavor. The result of having our minds renewed by the Spirit is to grow in our ability to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. The Word translated discern literally means to prove by testing. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (see John 10:10).

MATTHEW 13:18-23

13:18-19. These verses connect Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower and the soils (13:18-23) with the disciples' privilege as hearers of the truth. Jesus was saying to them, "Because you have responded to what you have already seen with eyes, ears, and hearts of faith and humble obedience, I will show you even more. You have proven faithful with little, so I will trust you with much."

The soils were the issue. Throughout the parable's explanation, Jesus compared the four kinds of soil with various kinds of people who had been exposed to His teaching. The first soil,

that “along the path” (13:4), was packed and hardened by traffic. It represented the person who does not understand the Word he had heard. The person represented by the hardened soil is one who chooses not to understand rather than a person who wants to understand but cannot.

Such a person may actually understand Jesus’ teaching in a literal sense but refuse to accept its truth. The Biblical concept of “understanding” goes beyond the idea of mental comprehension. It sometimes includes volitional acceptance. In 21:45, the chief priests and Pharisees knew the meaning of Jesus’ parable concerning them, but they refused to accept its truth.

13:20-21. The rocky soil (13:5-6) receives extra attention in both the parable and its explanation because this person’s response to the truth follows a two-stage pattern. His initial response is unreserved and emotional—joyful acceptance—but only because the circumstances are favorable. The cost of commitment is not yet obvious. This person’s commitment is not deeply rooted. We might say that the truly committed “pay their dues up front,” but the marginally committed cancel their membership when payment comes due. The cost of commitment to the Messiah comes in the form of trouble (thlipsis, “tribulation”) or persecution (diogmos) that come because of the Word. As quickly as this individual had committed, just as quickly he defected, distancing himself from the Word or message.

13:22. The soil with thorns (13:7) is also assumed to produce some initial growth, as did the rocky places (13:20). But the influence which draws this person away from a sustained interest is not persecution but competing “gods”—the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Rather than being driven from the truth by hardship, this person is lured away from the truth by promises of something better. Of course, these promises will never be fulfilled, because these competing gods or masters are deceitful.

Is this kind of person saved? The language may lean somewhat toward believing that this person had responded initially with sincere faith, for the seedling is not said to die (as we can presume with the rocky soil, 13:21), but rather to become choked and unfruitful. Still, without perseverance, there is no final evidence of salvation.

We have already seen in Matthew an example of a person who started following Jesus, but then began giving excuses for why he needed to postpone his commitment (8:21-22). But even more prominent in this category would be Judas Iscariot, who sold out Jesus for thirty coins (26:14-16, 20-25, 48-50; 27:1-10).

13:23. All three of the preceding “soils” had heard the Word. So also the fourth good soil hears the Word, but this one also understands. This person chooses to understand and accept the truth, also accepting the One who is truth (John 14:6). None of the other soils bore any fruit, but this soil yielded much fruit. Jesus did not clarify what caused the variability between the fruitfulness of various faithful followers. One factor may be the degrees of faith. Perhaps another factor has to do with the variety of tasks given to different believers by God. Some may have greater potential for bearing fruit than others (cf. the different number of talents and different levels of return in 25:14-30). Crop represents the tangible results of a life of faith, including Godly character (Gal. 5:22-23) and other souls brought into the kingdom (Matt. 9:37-38; cf. John 15:1-17).

WE

DEMOLISH

OUR

STRONGHOLDS

SESSION 4

LEADER NOTE

This section is a way to briefly review the last few weeks before getting into today's lesson. Please be careful to keep it brief. We don't need to re-teach the other lessons in the series; we want to help learners see how this lesson is related to the ones before it.

WE UNDERSTAND OUR ENEMY

What have you learned about the enemy in this study so far? What have you learned about the battle we all face?

We know that the enemy is real and wars against us. The devil is working to destroy God's people and defame God's glory. The struggle is real, and we must take up the spiritual equipment God has given us as we pray for Him to empower us to faithfully stand and fight.

Ultimately, Jesus has already won the war. We must recognize we're not fighting to win; we're fighting because we have already won! As we fight from the place of victory, Satan fights with great venom. He cannot achieve ultimate victory in the lives of those who belong to Jesus, but he can rob us of abundant life in the here and now. We must be aware of his schemes to steal our understanding, kill our joy, and destroy our purpose.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus battled demonic forces and addressed demonic strongholds. Since the Bible teaches Satan will be more active in the last days, we should expect to regularly battle demonic forces and strongholds, too. To do that, we must define strongholds, describe our particular strongholds, and demolish strongholds through faith in God, whose victorious power is at work in you.

DEFINING SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

Pastor Grant pointed out that most Christians live like the Bible says, "Ignore the devil and he will flee from you!" Read Ephesians 6:10 together: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Name some situations or relationships where you have ignored the devil's schemes. What would it look like for you to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" instead?

KEY VERSES

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion

raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

How would you characterize Paul's view about spiritual warfare?

- It doesn't exist for those who are saved.
- It exists, but it's not a big deal because Jesus already took care of it.
- With effort and willpower, you can overcome Satan's schemes.
- There is a real battle going on, and believers are wise to actively engage in it.

Based on 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, what does it look like, practically, for a person to actively engage in spiritual warfare?

In this week's message, we learned these three truths about strongholds:

- A stronghold is a pattern (cycle, habit) of unrighteous thinking and living that holds you hostage outside the will of God.
- Any area of your life that is not under the Lordship of Jesus Christ can influence and set up strongholds.
- Secret sins lead to strongholds.

Can you have a spiritual stronghold and not be aware of it? How might that happen?

DESCRIBING SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

LEADER NOTE

This section is the first of three that will help believers understand and deal with spiritual strongholds. Many believers are cautious to openly discuss their struggles. Part of the enemy's ploy for keeping us in strongholds is to make us believe we should be ashamed and continue to suffer in silence. Part of God's plan for demolishing strongholds in our lives is for us to recognize we all struggle with them and can face them together as the body of Christ. This is why it is important to begin your study of the Scriptures by defining and identifying spiritual strongholds. Be prepared, like Paul did, to share a personal stronghold you have previously dealt with (2 Cor. 2:11).

Pastor Grant noted, "Satan makes strong people weak. God makes weak people strong." **How does this impact your view of strongholds and your responses to the temptations you face?**

SIX COMMON STRONGHOLDS:

- Emotional
- Chemical
- Marital
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial

Add to the list any other common strongholds you can think of.

Why is it important to describe your spiritual strongholds?

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 2:11

¹¹ (I have forgiven) so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Paul recognized he needed to forgive people so that he and other believers wouldn't be outside God's will in a spiritual stronghold. **Thinking about the common strongholds listed above, what do you need to do so that you won't be outside God's will, held captive by a spiritual stronghold?**

Why was it important for Paul to confess his need to forgive to the Corinthian believers? Why is it important for you to confess the areas where you have or could potentially have strongholds?

DEMOLISHING SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

KEY VERSES

REVELATION 12:7-11

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.¹⁰

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

How does this passage encourage you in the spiritual battles you face?

Pastor Grant explained that a spiritual stronghold requires a spiritual solution. Jesus defeated Satan and demons at the cross. That defeat doesn't only offer you victory over death. There is power in the blood of the Lamb every day to demolish strongholds and live in victory!

KEY VERSES

2 TIMOTHY 2:24-26

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant

them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Based on verse 25, what role does repentance have in demolishing spiritual strongholds?

YOUR NEXT STEP TOWARD DEMOLISHING SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

LEADER NOTE

Regardless of where a person is in his or her spiritual life, everyone has a next step to take. Use this time to help learners personally apply biblical truths to their lives and commit to allow Jesus to demolish spiritual strongholds. Emphasize that simple awareness of the struggle brings no victory and change to our lives unless we pair that awareness with faith and action.

How have the truths presented and explored in this series changed the way you think about the struggles you face?

Pastor Grant said, “Change the way you think and you will change the way that you live.” This series has been about awareness. To demolish spiritual strongholds requires that we understand Satan’s purposes, the power of Christ, the spiritual equipment available to us to stand firm, and the call to actively use that equipment in Christ’s power.

What next step do you need to take to demolish spiritual strongholds:

- Identify and acknowledge my struggles to God in prayer.
- Confess my struggles to another believer who can pray for me and hold me accountable.
- Praise Jesus daily for the victory He has already won on my behalf by His death and resurrection.
- Repent, and prayerfully determine to stop letting the enemy have his way with me.
- Get help from a pastor or Christian counselor to proactively address the strongholds that hold me captive from living in God’s will.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

In this section of 2 Corinthians (10:1-11), Paul warned the church that he might have to deal harshly with those who refused his authority after he returned to the city.

In verses 3-5 Paul responded to the critics who had attacked his integrity and ministry. He explained how he had successfully fought for the truth of the Gospel. He reminded the Corinthian believers that being in this body does not mean that we go to war in the physical realm: although we are walking in the flesh, we do not wage war in a fleshly way.

Our enemies are not “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12); they are Satan and his demons. Thus we cannot engage in spiritual warfare with weapons of the physical world: the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful through God. We are no match for Satan, but we serve an almighty God who has already supplied us with powerful weapons to defeat our enemy.

Defeating Satan means that we must be prepared to demolish strongholds, which we can see as anything that allows Satan to get a foothold in what should be God’s territory—our lives.

This could be the books we read, the movies we watch, viewing porn on the Internet, or anger and resentment against people that we haven't dealt with. All of these are strongholds that need to be demolished so Satan cannot use them against us. We also need to be ready to defend the faith (apologetics) against those who spew out Satan's lies against God and His Son: We demolish arguments and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God. Specifically, this includes taking every thought captive.

Our minds think constantly, and our minds have to work in several main directions in the spiritual realm. Two of them are to demolish arguments against the Gospel and to protect our minds from the impurities that Satan throws our way. Every Christian has to say, "My thoughts are my prisoners and I will make them obey Christ." As we engage in the battle for the mind, we must be proactive in controlling our thoughts. We should be disciplined in our thinking and not allow our thoughts to run wild.

The word translated "thought" is connected in this letter to the activities of Satan, either as part of Satan's designs to outwit us (2:11), or as the object of Satan's assault. In 3:14 the minds of the Israelites were hardened, necessitating Moses' veil. In 4:4 Paul says that the minds of unbelievers have been blinded by the god of this world In 11:3 he candidly says that Satan has ensnared the Corinthians' "thoughts" in the same way he deceived Eve. Satan holds their minds hostage, and Paul is prepared to fight a pitched battle to liberate them.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:11

To lend support to his assertion, Paul drew upon an analogy between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. He began by acknowledging that many things about a person's thoughts remain hidden to other people. Yet, the person's own spirit knows these thoughts. No one can get inside the minds of other people as deeply as they can understand themselves.

The comparison with the Holy Spirit is evident. We are not able to peer into the mind of God from the outside by human wisdom. In this sense, no one knows the thoughts of God. At the same time, however, the Spirit of God knows and can reveal the wisdom of God to us. The Corinthians, of course, took credit for their understanding of the Gospel and other spiritual things, thinking they had attained them through human wisdom. By correcting this error, Paul removed the basis for the quarrels and divisions that existed among them.

REVELATION 12:7-11

12:7-10 Because it is mentioned immediately after the woman fleeing into the wilderness (v. 6) and because its outcome immediately affects the earth at the end of the age (vv. 12-13), the war... in heaven probably also takes place just after the midpoint of the tribulation period. Some interpreters hold that the cosmic war pictured here occurred after Satan's original fall (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-17) or during the events surrounding Christ's crucifixion (Col 2:14-15). The sense that the "woman" in Rev 12:6 is a believing remnant of Israel is strengthened by the clash of the dragon (identified as the devil and Satan) with Michael the archangel (Jd 9), who is assigned to protect Israel (Dan 12:1).

12:11 Sometimes what looks like defeat is victory, as when believers die for their faith. Satan has killed them, but they are the ultimate victors because of the blood of the Lamb (Christ's death on the cross) and the word of their testimony.

2 TIMOTHY 2:23-26

2:23-24. Paul issued another command: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments." Paul had the false teachers and their followers in mind. Their dogmas lacked common sense (foolish) and were established upon ignorance (stupid). These bogus leaders and their followers were motivated by selfishness. Such inner drives always degenerate into petty quarrels and divisiveness. Paul declared, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel."

Selfish attitudes and manners are inconsistent with the nature of God and the disposition of His followers, especially His leaders. Unfortunately, infighting and positioning for power often characterize churches. Perhaps we have become too accustomed to this blatant disobedience, viewing it as an inevitable component of modern church life. But pastors and lay leaders who bicker, creating factions within the church, are wrong. Instead, the church leader must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Kindness presupposes a peaceable attitude. Such a mindset speaks and acts in goodness. This does not mean spineless acquiescence to popular opinion or to those who may oppose us. Kindness must remain firmly rooted in truth. Paul required that the Christian leader be able to teach, not be resentful.

2:25-26. If a leader's heart is pure, humbled before God's grace, he can then gently instruct those who err, in the hope that God will grant them repentance. God's earnest desire to draw all people into loving relationship with Himself should motivate the pastor to deal kindly with those who oppose Him. Four players participate in this crucial drama for the human soul: the teacher, the unbeliever, God, and Satan. The Christian teacher not only proclaims truth; he models godliness and kindness as well. As God's representative, he personifies God and His ways. He also recognizes that the battle for human souls takes place on two fronts—the mind and the heart. Beyond the human sphere, God and Satan enter man's spiritual struggle. Those who refuse God's truth come under the influence of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. Satan traps people into his service through clever arguments, fear, and appeals to selfish pride and ambition. Christians should exercise a healthy awareness of the participation of Satan in the thinking of unbelievers. Contending for truth involves contending with spiritual powers; we must not be so naive as to think we confront on purely human terms. But God remains faithful. He also contends for human souls and minds. As a measure of His grace, He grants repentance. God is sovereign over the universe and

all created beings. We should never become overwhelmed at Satan's methods or power. Satan and God are not equals.