

Turning Points 4 – When the Dream Dies

OFFERING

Hello, everyone!

You may not know this, but we just wrapped up our ministry year and started a new one. Which means now is the time we would normally begin a new budget year. However, we're in a bit of a unique financial situation right now, so I wanted to bring you up to speed.

Over the last 12 months, **you have been tremendously generous**. Especially as COVID hit, we were blown away by your willingness to share so generously what God had given you to make the ministries of Grace happen. Thank you!

However, we never know exactly what to expect with our giving, so last year we set our budget about 11% higher than what ultimately came in.

Now, we didn't spend money we didn't have. We made cuts where we could, we kept open staff positions unfilled, and ultimately we were able to end the year **in the black with our reserves intact**.

But now it's time to start a new budget year and, with last year's giving 11% below budget, and with the pandemic causing major financial distress in our country, it would be irresponsible to presume our giving is going to *increase*.

And so as we form this budget we're faced with some very **challenging decisions** about the future of Grace. We're asking hard questions about how to not just *survive* in this season, but how to thrive. How we can both weather the storm of *this* crisis, but also prepare ourselves for the future.

So first, if you are willing, pray for us as we navigate these uncharted waters. We need wisdom, we need unity, and we need discernment. So let's ask God together to guide us.

Second, if you are in a position where you *can* be generous, **please consider giving**. When you give, you make the ministry of Grace Church possible.

And maybe, if you can't give a big, one-time gift, maybe set up reoccurring giving. Even if it's \$5 a month! When you do that you're putting **a stake in the ground** and saying, "I want to be a part of what God is doing here."

Ok. That's the update. I just want to say thanks again for joining us on this wild mission to heal the world in Jesus' name.

Now, we're going to continue our **sermon series**, *If You Only Knew*, looking at major turning points in our lives: caring for aging parents, parenting adult children, marriage, and today, when life hits the wall.

As a reminder, if you have *any* questions about what we're teaching, send them in to **gracechurch.us/thegoodlife** and we may respond to them next week.

Now, let's continue our series, *If You Only Knew*.

[VIDEO: Panel]

SERIES INTRO

We just heard from three Grace people who have been through some awful circumstances. And thanks to God they've all found their way through them.

Today we're going to talk about **what posture we as Christ-followers should take** in our own lives when the dream dies, when we hit the wall, when things fall apart.

But before we get into that, I want to acknowledge that right now there is **a Grace family** going through their own version of this. And it's just about the most awful circumstance imaginable.

Last weekend, **Pat and Kesha Kelly** lost their high school aged sons, **Liam** and **Reece**, in a tragic plane crash. As you can imagine, they are facing an unbelievable amount of grief. So before we continue, let's take a moment and pray for the family.

[PRAY]

THE ENEMY

Now let's turn to God's word and see what Scripture has to say to us today. Please turn to **Ephesians 6:10**.

Throughout this letter, the Apostle Paul is painting a picture of **how Christ-followers should live** and behave in the midst of this still broken world. He's just finished the household code I mentioned last week. This is how he starts to close his letter.

Ephesians 6:10-18

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

Now, in the ancient Roman Empire, when Paul wrote this, life was pretty tough. The world was broken, just as it is today.

Persecution against Christians was starting to intensify. **Plague and infant mortality and war** was commonplace. And that was in a world already overwhelmed by **violence and hatred and injustice** at the hands of evil people. Paul was writing this from prison!

And yet, in the midst of all this brokenness, Paul says that Christians are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies. Who are we fighting against?

Well, according to this, **the devil, unseen rulers and authorities, mighty powers, and evil spirits.**

How does that strike you? From my experience, there are two tendencies we have within the Church - two extremes we go to we start talking about this stuff - about “spiritual warfare.”

First, some think of it all as kind of **silly**. They picture the devil as a red, horned, pitchfork-holding caricature. It’s all superstition and they don’t really pay it any mind.

But others go **the other direction**. They dive in headfirst and try to figure it all out. How many demons there are and exactly what you have to say to overpower them. They see every temptation, every disease, every open parking spot as the outcome of an unseen spiritual war.

We’re not going to get deeply into the conversation today, but I will say this. **The truth is likely neither of those extremes.** Spiritual warfare *is real*, we do have an enemy. But what the enemy is and how it operates in our world is far more mysterious than we often want to admit.

What you see when you look through Scripture is exactly what Paul describes here: a **whole range of evil forces** working to undermine the purposes of God.

When you look at the Old Testament, you see what Paul calls “rulers and

authorities.” Spiritual beings pulling the strings of entire ancient nations. Little “g” gods who spread evil systems in the world - “mighty powers” who feed injustice, corruption, violence, greed... They poison humanity against God’s intentions (even though it’s the humans who choose to obey them)

When you look at the gospels, you see **Jesus freeing people** from what Paul calls “evil spirits...” Unclean influences who hold people captive with disease or disability or emotional anguish.

And throughout the whole Bible you see **one primary spiritual being** who is directly opposed to the purposes of God. The one coordinating these dark rulers and spirits and powers. The one we call Satan, or the Devil. Except, neither of those are proper names. They’re titles.

śāṭān - the adversary, the accuser (Hebrew)
diabolos - the slanderer (Greek)

In other words, the Evil One accomplishes his purposes not through violence and power but through **lies and accusations and slander**. He gets *us* to turn this world against God’s intentions. God wants to heal the brokenness of this world; the Evil One wants to break it even further.

And this is what is so relevant to today’s topic. When we are in Christ, **the Evil One has no power** over us at all. He’s just a fly buzzing around us whispering lies in our ear.

But when the dream dies, when the bottom falls out, when we are in a crisis we can’t see our way through, the slanderer is right there **ready to strike us down with doubt, with shame, with confusion...** the adversary is looking to entangle us in broken, worldly systems of greed and hatred and injustice...

He knows Christ is victorious, but he still wants us out of the fight, he wants us to give up, and he knows that in the middle of our worst moments, we’re very, very vulnerable to his schemes.

In verse 16, Paul refers to the “fiery arrows of the devil.” Which I find interesting.

Because in ancient warfare, **flaming arrows** were way less effective in causing damage. They didn’t fly as far, they weren’t as powerful as regular arrows. But armies still used them. Why? Because they were terrifying. Flaming missiles flying right at you and then landing, setting everything on fire... It’s scary stuff.

Flaming arrows don’t cause damage. They cause *terror*.

Which is why the evil one shoots them at us, especially when we’re vulnerable. He wants us cowering in fear. He wants us to retreat... anything which would turn us away from trusting our God and fighting back.

This is why, when our life hits the wall, we so often :

- **Avoid getting help** because we’re ashamed
- **Self-medicate** with drugs or alcohol or pornography to numb the pain
- Why we get so **overwhelmed by fear** we don’t take any action
- Why we start **doubting God** or questioning his goodness instead of turning to him for help

In our worst moments we so often buy the lies and we put this powerless accuser in charge.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

So what are we supposed to do about this? **Until the New Creation is fully here**, we’re not going to live lives free of pain or tragedy or grief or hardship. We’re either in a crisis now or we’re going to be.

What do we do in the meantime knowing we have such a treacherous enemy?

Well, according to Paul in verse 10. We need to “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” To do that we have to put on the armor of God so that we can “stand firm against all strategies of the devil.”

Or, more literally, to stand against the “**crafty schemes of the slanderer.**” The armor of God will protect us from them.

So let’s talk about this armor of God. What is Paul talking about here?

Well, first of all, to try and share **Paul’s mental image** here, I think it’s helpful to picture a Roman legionary **[image: Roman]**.

By this point in history, the Roman Empire was near its peak. All over Ephesus and the surrounding territory it would have been very common to see soldiers dressed like that walking around.

Plus, Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this letter, so it’s entirely possible he was looking at his own prison guard’s armor when he wrote this.

But, this whole concept of the armor of God was **not actually Paul’s idea**. He was building on something he read in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Listen to this:

Isaiah 59:15

*The LORD looked and was displeased
to find there was no justice.
He was amazed to see that no one intervened
to help the oppressed.
So he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm,
and his justice sustained him.
He put on righteousness as his body armor
and placed the helmet of salvation on his head.
He clothed himself with a robe of vengeance
and wrapped himself in a cloak of divine passion.*

*He will repay his enemies for their evil deeds.
His fury will fall on his foes.
He will pay them back even to the ends of the earth.*

The armor of God was Isaiah's way of describing **Yahweh bringing his intentions to fruition**. An end to injustice. An end to oppression. This broken world made right. That's what he's fighting for.

Now, of course, it's easy to hear word's like God's "fury will fall on his foes" and picture God blasting a bunch of evil *people*. But again, as Paul said, "our battle is not against flesh-and-blood enemies."

God is at war against the evil one - the slanderer - who is working furiously to disrupt the restoration of this broken creation. God's enemy is the accuser who corrupts humanity and enlists *us* to spread injustice and hatred and greed and oppression.

God doesn't want to *blast* us. He wants to *rescue* us from this constant drive to spread sin and corruption and death. That's why the Father sent his own son to die, to break us free.

God is on a mission to rescue humanity.

So to do that, as Isaiah says, **God dresses for battle**. He puts on his body armor of righteousness - his justice, his intentions. God puts on the helmet of salvation - the power to rescue and deliver. And then he goes to war. "Wrapped in a cloak of divine passion"

Nothing will stop Yahweh from bringing his children home.

Get that mental image in your head. God arming himself for battle against evil. This is what inspired Paul to write Ephesians 6.

We're fighting against the crafty schemes of the evil one. We're fighting against the brokenness of our world. Especially when our life

hits the wall, we are at war.

v.13 “Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil.”

For a long time, I thought he was saying, **put on *godly* armor**. Put on metaphorical armor which represents some spiritual ideas. Some kind of thought experiment. But that’s not what he’s saying at all. **He’s saying, put on *God’s armor* - the actual armor God wears.**

Because it’s now available to us.

Because of the sacrifice of our Savior, we are now freed from our shackles to sin and we can now join God’s battle to bring life and justice and peace and healing into this broken world. **And we are wearing *his armor* to do it.**

Imagine God is talking directly to you. He says, “Look. You are going through an awful time right now in this broken world. Or you’ve got some hard days coming. You’re going to hit the wall. Your dreams will fall apart.

And when that happens, **the slanderer is going to throw everything he’s got at you**. He’s wants you to be afraid. To give up.

So here. **Take my body armor**. This is my righteousness. You wear this and what I intend will come to pass in your life.

The evil one’s best strategy is to lie to you. To tell you you’re worthless. To tell you you’re alone. So here. **This is the belt of my truth**. You don’t have to believe his lies anymore. You are my child.

Here. **Put these on your feet**. Remember what the prophet Isaiah said?

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains

*are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,
the good news of peace and salvation,
the news that the God of Israel reigns!*

Well now those are *your* feet. It's your good news to share. Tell the world the battle is won.

Here. Our enemy is going to shoot flaming arrows of fear at you. He wants you terrified. **Take my shield.** This is the shield of faith. Of trust in me. With this protecting you, you can be confident and brave and his arrows won't even touch you.

This is my **helmet of salvation**. Remember. My salvation is already accomplished through Jesus. This is a reminder that you have been delivered.

But I don't just want you protected. It's time to go on the offense. This is **the sword of my Spirit**. I have put my Spirit within you which means you have my power at your disposal.

You have my word in your mouth. You can strike down evil wherever you find it. **You can heal injustice and oppression in my name.**

And remember: When you pray, you're now praying with my Spirit.

So yeah. You will face hardship. Your life may not end up the way you think. But **you are wearing my armor now** and you have nothing to fear.

Ephesians 6:13

After the battle you will still be standing firm.

PRACTICAL TRUTHS

Wow. That takes this passage to a whole new level, doesn't it? We're wearing *God's* armor.

What does that look like, **practically**? Well, the problem is that "hitting the

wall” is **such a broad topic**.

It could be everything from the loss of a loved one to a disease you’re facing to losing work during the pandemic. And not every problem hits everyone the same way.

So rather than giving a bunch of specific advice, I want to give you some **simple, but deep, truths** you can remember, based directly on Paul’s words here. If you’re going through the valley right now, I believe the Spirit will cause one of these to stand out to you. If it does, hold onto it.

1) God is still working.

Regardless of your circumstance, when you hit the wall, one of the first lies the slanderer will try to convince you of is that God has abandoned you. It’s the same deception again and again and again.

The truth is, **the same God** who was going to war against oppression in Isaiah, who was fighting the dark powers in Ephesus, is right now battling the brokenness of *your* world. We may not see it. It may not be on our timetable. But God is still working.

I’ve talked about this before, but when I was in my mid-20’s, I went through a season where every single job I applied to fell through. I could not for the life of me find work.

And I’ll admit **my first reaction** was buy the lies, to give in to fear and to shake my fist at God and wonder why he’d drop me on my face like that.

What I didn’t realize until much later was that God was using that season of unemployment to prepare me for a trip to India where he planted the idea for my non-profit, which launched me on a wild journey of ministry which ultimately led me here.

God was still working. If I had only held up his shield of faith when the flaming arrows of fear came flying in, perhaps I wouldn't have been so afraid.

2) It's not your power.

When it comes to enduring the challenges of a broken world, one of our biggest temptations will be to try and muster the strength within ourselves to power through. It's no surprise. Self-reliance is the American way.

This is why I love the idea of **wearing God's armor and not our own**. It's a reminder that God is the one giving us strength. It's *his* breastplate we're wearing. It's *his* helmet on our heads.

This is why Paul says put on God's armor *so that* you can stand firm... *so that* you can resist the enemy. It is when we *acknowledge* our weaknesses and allow God to fight *for* us that we can truly endure.

As Paul said it elsewhere,

2 Corinthians 12:9

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

It's not your power which will see you through this. It's God's.

Finally,

3) You are not alone.

Earlier I showed you a picture of a Roman legionary. What made the Romans so successful in battle was not that they had stronger soldiers or that they had special gear, necessarily.

No. They were powerful because they fought as a unit.

When Roman soldiers came under enemy fire, they could quickly lock their shields into the *testudo* formation (the tortoise). [image: testudo] Nothing could get through that. The arrows would stop and then they'd get right back up and keep marching toward the enemy.

A Roman legionary by himself was formidable. **A Roman *legion* was unstoppable.**

I know Paul doesn't explicitly mention us fighting together here, but all his commands are plural. He's talking to *us*, the Church, the body of Christ. None of us fights alone.

I bring this up to remind you that if you're going through the deep waters right now, if you feel surrounded by forces beyond your control, I want you to remember that you are wearing the armor of God, and **you're standing shoulder to shoulder with others who are wearing it too.**

Don't face your crisis alone.

Lean on your spiritual family. Depend on your life group. We'll remind you of your salvation. We'll wrap you in truth. We'll shield you with our faith. And we will join our voices to yours in a battle cry of prayer.

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God is still working. It's not your power. And you are not alone.

With God's armor protecting you, you will stand strong.

[PRAY]