

THE STRONGER ONE

Session 4: The Armory

Ephesians 6:10-18

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that God does not send his soldiers to war in their own clothes: he issues armor, piece by piece, and (the session's central discovery) the central pieces are his own armor: Isaiah saw the LORD himself put on the breastplate and helmet Paul later names. Tonight the study's second thread resolves in our synthesis: the enemy's trusted armor is best read as the lie, already stripped; ours is truth, and it is issued, not earned.

Catholic Touchstone. Prayer as battle (CCC 2725); Confirmation's special strength for witness (CCC 1303); the virtue of fortitude (CCC 1808).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Ephesians 6:10-18 is the Bible's best-known armor passage, and familiarity is tonight's main enemy: half your group can recite the pieces and has never once put them on. Your task is to make the passage strange again, and Paul gives you three strangenesses to work with.

First, the grammar of strength. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (v. 10): the verb leans passive, closer to "be strengthened." Nobody musters this strength; it is received. And the armor is "of God" not merely because he commands it but because he supplies it: it is worn in the Lord and in the strength of his might. After three sessions inside the anatomy of our weakness, this is the turn: the quartermaster is God, and the requisition form is prayer (v. 18, which is not an afterthought trailing the armor but the mode in which all of it is worn: "Pray at all times in the Spirit").

Second, the enemy list. "We are not contending against flesh and blood" (v. 12). Say this slowly in a room full of people whose strongholds have human faces: the coworker, the ex-husband, the father whose sentence became the wall. Paul insists that no human being is your ultimate enemy. The people who hurt you are morally responsible for what they did, and justice, safeguarding, and boundaries remain fully legitimate; but they are not the power this war is against, and hatred aimed at them serves the real enemy. This verse retargets years of misdirected fire, and for some in your group it will be the sentence of the study.

Third, the inventory itself, read against the strongholds we have mapped. "Having girded your loins with truth" (the soldier's belt): the direct answer to the fog ("Did God say...?"). The breastplate of righteousness over the heart: the answer to accusation and shame (and in Session 5 the group will learn where righteousness is actually issued). Feet shod with the gospel of peace: a soldier's footing; peace as traction, not vacation. The shield of faith quenching "all the flaming darts of the evil one": the darts can certainly include burning sentences (accusations, doubts, despairs), and the shield is not certainty but trust. The helmet of salvation over the mind: Session 6 will spend an evening under that helmet. And one named weapon: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God": the group already watched this sword used three times in the wilderness, drawn from memory. The inventory's one explicitly named

weapon is the Word, which fits Session 3's discovery that the war for consent is a war against lies, won with truth.

The deep structure, which the central Discovery Moment will surface: Paul did not invent this armor. Isaiah saw the LORD wear it: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head" (Isaiah 59:17), in a passage where God, finding no man to intervene, arms himself and comes to save. A related girding clothes the Messiah (righteousness and faithfulness, Isaiah 11:5), and the feet shod with good news are Isaiah's herald (52:7); Ephesians' shield and sword are Paul's own additions. So the heart of the kit is God's armor: the Church is issued what her Champion already fought in. And here the study states its synthesis plainly, ours rather than any single verse's claim: Luke 11:22 says the Stronger One "takes away his armor in which he trusted" without naming it; Session 3 found his campaign arsenal to be the sentence; Colossians 2:15 says the powers were disarmed at the cross. Put together: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, and it failed him; ours is the Victor's own kit, and it has never lost.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 59:16-17. God sees that there is no one to intervene, so "his own arm brought him victory," and he dresses for war: righteousness as breastplate, salvation as helmet. The breastplate and helmet of Ephesians 6 are borrowed downward from God to us. Central discovery; do not name the wearer in advance.

Isaiah 11:5 and 52:7. The Messiah girded for the same war ("Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins": related girding, where Paul's belt is truth) and the herald's beautiful feet ("who publishes peace"). Secondary finds if the group keeps hunting.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians (his exposition of the armor, Homily 22 and following)

Preaching through Ephesians, St. John Chrysostom teaches, in substance, that Paul's armor is not ceremonial but campaign issue for a real and unrelenting fight: each piece has its function, the whole kit is meant to be worn, and the soldier of Christ must live in constant readiness.

For our purposes (the images are ours): the armor is a kit, not a menu, and a man armored everywhere but the head is a casualty waiting for his wound. Most stronghold relapses walk in through the one piece left on the bench.

Presented as a broad summary of his preaching on the passage; the kit and casualty images are this study's illustrations, not his wording.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Patrick

The Lorica ("St. Patrick's Breastplate"), long attributed to him

The great Irish battle-prayer long attributed to St. Patrick arms the Christian not with things but with a Person: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left." The prayer binds Christ to the body like plate to a torso, at rising and lying down, in the eye and ear of every man the pray-er meets.

For our purposes: this is Ephesians 6 prayed instead of parsed. The armor of God, worn, invites us to

see Christ himself put on (Romans 13:14). Teach someone the Lorica and you have handed them the whole session.

Attribution of the Lorica to St. Patrick is traditional rather than certain; the prayer is ancient and long used in Christian devotion, especially in Ireland. Quoted in a commonly received English form; translations vary.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Alphonsus Liguori

Prayer, the Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection

St. Alphonsus teaches, in substance and with famous bluntness, that prayer is the great and necessary means of salvation: in his celebrated axiom, the one who prays is certainly saved, and the one who does not pray is certainly lost. God, he teaches, ordinarily grants his help through our asking, and prayer itself is grace's gift before it is our work.

For our purposes (the military images are ours): prayer is the weapon the weakest hand can always lift, and the enemy's first objective in any siege is to talk the garrison out of praying. Verse 18 is not the caboose of the armor; it is the supply line, alongside the sacraments the coming session opens. If your people take one habit from tonight, let it be the one St. Alphonsus would choose.

Presented as a close summary of his celebrated axiom and teaching in that work, understood as his doctrine of prayer as the ordinary and necessary means, not a mechanical guarantee; not a verbatim quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2725.** "Prayer is a battle." The Catechism's own opening words, which it unfolds: against ourselves, and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to draw us away from prayer and from union with God (CCC 2725, paraphrased beyond the opening words). The Catechism itself names the struggle to pray as central to the life of prayer.
- **CCC 1303.** Confirmation gives "a special strength of the Holy Spirit" to spread and defend the faith as true witnesses of Christ. Most of your group has already been issued more armor than they have ever drawn from stores.
- **CCC 1808.** "Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good." The armor presumes a spine inside it; fortitude is that spine, and it grows by use.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE ARMOR HE TRUSTED (RESOLVES TONIGHT). Luke 11:22 left a phrase hanging in Session 1: the Stronger One "takes away his armor in which he trusted." Session 3 quietly inventoried the enemy's armory and found only sentences. Tonight the group holds both halves of the study's synthesis: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, stripped at the cross (Luke 11:22 with Session 3's inventory and Colossians 2:15: teach it honestly as our synthesis, not any verse's explicit claim); the heart of our armor is God's own (Isaiah 59:17), issued to us. When the discovery lands, name the resolution and enjoy it; the study has been walking toward this for three weeks.

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops). The flaming darts of verse 16 are the voice's ammunition: burning sentences. The shield that quenches them is faith, trust in the Father the voice slanders. Final naming still waits for Session 8.

THE SWEPT HOUSE (near horizon). Tonight ends with the group armored; next week the house gets

occupied. If someone asks “but where do I actually get the breastplate of righteousness?”, smile: that is literally next session (Confession).

THE WALL (one week out). Remind the group at closing, briefly and warmly: bring your sealed sheet next week. Next session it opens, alone, before the Lord.

SESSION GOALS

1. Recover the passive grammar of verse 10: strength received, armor issued, prayer as the requisition line.
2. Retarget the war with verse 12: no human being is the ultimate enemy, though human agency and just boundaries remain real.
3. Map each piece of armor onto the stronghold war the group has already studied: fog, accusation, restlessness, darts, despair.
4. Discover Isaiah 59:17 by group hunt: the heart of the armor of God is God’s own armor, worn first by the Victor.
5. Resolve the study’s second thread as our stated synthesis: his armor (the lie) stripped; our armor (truth) issued.
6. Send everyone home wearing it: the Lorica, a daily suiting-up prayer, and verse 18 restored to its place as supply line.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: verses 10-13, the grammar and the real enemy: 20 min
- Build: the inventory, verses 14-17, mapped to the stronghold war: 20 min
- Discovery Moment: Isaiah 59:17 and the thread resolution: 12 min
- Steelman, Send, Live It, Lorica and closing: 20 min

A prep note on fasting: the tradition’s constant companion to combat prayer is fasting; this study does not build a session on it, but name it as ordinary equipment, and an optional fast day appears in Session 5’s Live It.

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and take Win question 1 only. Do not cut the Isaiah discovery or the verse 12 retargeting; they are the hinge and the healing of the night.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, EVERY SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle; sharing questions stay general. Restate confidentiality if anyone new is present. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, walk the person warmly toward Confession, a pastor or spiritual director, and appropriate professional help; grace and good medicine are allies. Tonight’s verse 12 teaching (“not against flesh and blood”) must never be used to minimize real harm done by real people or to pressure premature reconciliation; naming the true enemy does not acquit human wrongdoing, and prudent boundaries can themselves be armor.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Lord God of hosts, you saw that there was no man to save us, so you armed yourself and came down.
Tonight, open the doors of your armory to us.
Strengthen us in the strength of your might, clothe us in what you yourself have worn,
and teach our hands the one sword you issue.
Through Christ our Lord, the Stronger One. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is a piece of equipment (work boots, an apron, a helmet, a uniform) that changes how you carry yourself the moment you put it on? What does it do to you?
2. If you had to walk out the door tomorrow into the hardest day of your year, what would you want on you (not with you: on you)?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Ephesians 6:10-13 aloud.

3. Look closely at verse 10: “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” Whose strength is it, and how does a person come by it? What does that already tell us about the armor before we see a single piece?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the Lord’s strength, and the verb is closer to “be strengthened”: received, not mustered. Nobody in this passage is told to be strong in himself; after three weeks inside the anatomy of our weakness, that is not an insult but a relief. And it frames the whole inventory: this is the armor “of God” because God supplies it. We do not forge this kit; we are issued it. The requisition line appears in verse 18, and we will not let it be a footnote.

4. Verse 12 names our enemies, and just as importantly, it un-names one. Who is not on the list? Say it carefully: what does “we are not contending against flesh and blood” mean for the human faces attached to your wall?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

No human being is on the list. The coworker, the ex, the parent whose sentence became your wall: none of them is the power this war is against; the enemy is “the spiritual hosts of wickedness.” That does not erase their agency: real people did real wrongs and answer for them, and justice may rightly be sought. But years of misdirected fire (resentment, fantasy arguments, revenge rehearsals) have been aimed where this war cannot be won.

Two careful edges, said aloud: this does not acquit anyone of real harm, and it does not oblige anyone to unsafe reunion; boundaries can be armor. What it does is free your fight and forbid hatred: the enemy loves nothing more than watching the people he tempts turn all their fire on one

another.

Read Ephesians 6:14-17 aloud.

5. Take the inventory piece by piece and match each one to the war we have already mapped: the fog, the accusation, the restlessness, the burning sentences, the despair. What does each piece answer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The belt of truth answers the fog (“Did God say...?”): everything else hangs on it, exactly as the serpent knew. The breastplate of righteousness guards the heart against accusation and shame, the enemy’s standing policy since Eden; how a baptized sinner who has lost his footing is restored to grace is next week’s whole session. Feet shod with the gospel of peace give a soldier footing: peace as traction for standing, not a hammock. The shield of faith “can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one”: the darts include the burning sentences (you are worthless, God is holding out, nothing will change), and the shield is not certainty but trust in the Father the sentences slander. The helmet of salvation guards the mind, the battlefield of Session 6.

And then the one named weapon: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” We have already watched this sword drawn three times in the wilderness, from memory. In the war for consent, where the enemy’s weapon is the lie, the named weapon issued is the truth. The arsenal makes perfect sense once you know the enemy.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE HEART OF THE NIGHT)

Say: Paul is not the first biblical writer to name a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation. Centuries earlier, a prophet watched someone put those two pieces on. Send the group to Isaiah 59 to find who the wearer is and why he arms (they are looking for verses 16-17); let them say the answer before you do.

Have it read aloud: finding no one to intervene, “his own arm brought him victory. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.” Then ask the question the whole study has been waiting for: if these are God’s own pieces, what are we being issued in Ephesians 6? Let them say it: the Church wears her Champion’s kit. He fought in it first; it has never lost. (Hunters who keep going can find the Messiah girded in righteousness and faithfulness in Isaiah 11:5, and the herald’s shod feet in Isaiah 52:7.)

Now resolve the thread from Session 1, honest about what each text contributes. Luke 11:22 says the Stronger One “takes away his armor in which he trusted”, without naming the armor. Session 3 inventoried his Eden arsenal and found sentences. Colossians 2:15 says the principalities were disarmed at the cross. The study’s synthesis, ours to teach as a synthesis: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, and at the cross it failed him. Tonight the exchange is complete: his armor taken; our armor, truth, issued, and its heart is the Victor’s own.

Read Ephesians 6:18 aloud.

6. Verse 18 comes after the sword, and most readers treat it as the passage winding down. Read it again as part of the armor: what is prayer’s actual role in the kit?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the supply line. “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication”: the whole kit is worn praying, because prayer is how issued equipment gets drawn and kept in use, together with the sacraments next session opens. St. Alphonsus’s blunt axiom belongs here: the one who prays is saved, and the one who does not pray is lost, for God ordinarily grants his help through our asking (prayer itself being his gift); so the enemy’s first objective in any siege is to talk the garrison out of praying. If your prayer has quietly died in the exact season your wall has quietly grown, that is not a coincidence; it is strategy: his. “Prayer is a battle” (CCC 2725), and it is the one battle that funds all the others.

Build, Then Press: The Lone Soldier

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A self-reliant friend says: “This is why my faith is private. Me, my Bible, my prayers: that is the whole armor right there, and I can wear it alone on a trail on Sunday morning better than in a pew. Organized religion adds nothing to Ephesians 6; if anything, church people have fired more darts at me than the devil ever did. The soldier keeps his own kit.”

Give it its due: the armor is personally worn, private prayer is irreplaceable, and the wounds from church people are often real.

7. Now press. Share two facts from your prep (Paul’s commands here are grammatically plural; the shield he names is the great door-shaped shield built for formation use), then look together at what verse 18 says prayer is for. Is this the equipment of a lone soldier?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every command in the passage is plural: Paul is addressing a body, arming a unit, not a hermit. The great shield he names (the *thureos*, the door-shaped shield) belonged to formation warfare: such shields could be overlapped with the shields beside them, and a soldier who wandered off alone turned his best equipment into a plank. And verse 18’s prayer is aimed outward: “with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”: the armored man’s first assignment is intercession for the soldiers next to him.

Grant the wounds; they are real, and verse 12 refuses both to excuse the human hands and to mistake them for the final enemy. But the conclusion runs the other way: an enemy whose pattern (St. Ignatius of Loyola’s discernment rules on secrecy and weak points, Session 3) is to isolate before he strikes is delighted by lone-soldier Christianity; and the armor itself is distributed through a Church, as next session’s sacraments make unmistakable. The armor is personal; the army is not optional. Shields overlap or shields fail.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Romans 13:12-14: “let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The armor, worn, invites us to see a Person put on: which is exactly what the Lorica prays.

1 Thessalonians 5:8: the breastplate reappears as “faith and love,” the helmet as “the hope of salvation.” The kit is consistent across Paul, and hope guards the head: despair is a head wound.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Which piece of the kit have you left on the bench: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, prayer? (St. John Chrysostom would ask it this way: where is your unguarded spot, and does your enemy know it better than you do?)

9. Who fights next to you? If the honest answer is “no one,” what would it cost you this week to lock shields with one other person: this group, a friend, a men’s or women’s group, an accountability partner?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Suit up daily.** Each morning, pray the armor on, piece by piece, in your own words, thirty seconds: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, ending with your Session 3 countersword verse: the sword goes in the hand, not the scabbard.
- **Learn the Lorica.** Pray the heart of St. Patrick’s Breastplate (“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me...”) once a day this week, slowly. By Sunday, own it from memory.
- **Fund the supply line.** Identify the hour your prayer usually dies (the tired hour, the phone hour) and put five minutes of supplication there, including by name one person who fights beside you, “making supplication for all the saints.”
- **Bring your sealed sheet next week.** Next session, the Wall opens: alone, in silence, before the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise.*

Lord Jesus, Stronger One: we take the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Ephesians 6:11

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 4, in order:

1. Ephesians 6:10-13 (main reading: be strengthened; not against flesh and blood)
2. Ephesians 6:14-17 (main reading: the inventory)
3. Isaiah 59:16-17 (Discovery Moment: God arms himself; breastplate and helmet)
4. Isaiah 11:5; 52:7 (secondary finds: the Messiah's belt; the herald's feet)
5. Luke 11:22 and Colossians 2:15 (thread resolution: his armor stripped)
6. Ephesians 6:18 (prayer as supply line)
7. Romans 13:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (Dig Deeper: armor of light; hope as helmet)
8. Ephesians 6:11 (memory verse)