

ENEMIES NO MORE

SESSION 7

Knocking Down the Dividing Walls of Hostility
Spiritual

Sharing Life

(20 minutes)

Gather: Greet your Life Group friends, enjoy a good laugh, share an update, eat a treat and be blessed! Isn't it great to be growing in love and intimacy with fellow believers in Jesus!

Discuss: Your *personal* Life Application Challenge this past week was to meditate and pray on the classic prayer of St. Francis, "Lord, make us instruments of your peace."

How did the Holy Spirit speak to your heart about your role in knocking down **societal** "*dividing walls of hostility*?"

What kind of progress have you been making with the spiritual disciplines of Daily Devotions, prayer time and Bible memory?

Recite the Memory Verse together from *Ephesians 4:28*.

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge was to identify an individual or family in your congregation or community that is experiencing some aspect of poverty and initiate a "group response" that would be received as a sign of God's love.

Have you been able to complete this group challenge? If so, talk about what you did and how it was received? What did you learn through this experience?

If you are still working together to accomplish this challenge, take a moment to discuss any details or obstacles that may need to be addressed.

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge was to engage in a deeper way with the issues of "systemic poverty" in your city or region. What did you do? What's next? Describe your city without "systemic poverty!"

Prayer Together: Dear God, you are awesome and amazing. Your love is greater than we can think or imagine. Your plans and purposes are perfect. We invite you, Jesus, to preside at this meeting and to be in the center of our Life Group circle. We welcome you, Holy Spirit, to be our teacher as we read and study the Word of Life. Please guide us into the truth. We declare that we are *“strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”* In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

Read: The Christian Church is suffering from a “power outage.” The power that is needed is not the kind produced by nuclear or hydro-electric plants, clean-coal technology, wind turbines or solar panels.

No, the power that is needed to transform the world today in Jesus’ name is the power of the Holy Spirit. It can only be produced by “trash to energy” technology. We must allow God to meet us where we’re at, with all our sin and weakness, and transform us from the inside out.

When the Spirit breaks through, we experience a “power surge” that is meant for the world. Electricity can’t be stored. It must be distributed to those in need or it quickly dissipates. The Good News is that when we stay connected, God continues to replenish our lives with new energy. We never experience a shut-down.

Christians need this Holy Spirit power because we are in a battle. This spiritual battle is fought in both the heavens and in our hearts. It manifests itself every day in thousands of practical decisions both great and small. You see, there is another power source that is soliciting us as customers and offering cheaper rates. Its CEO is Satan himself.

Discuss: How would you describe Satan or the devil: Real or fictitious? Powerful or weak? Active or passive? Part of your daily thought process or not on your radar?

Read: Jesus experienced temptation and torment from Satan throughout his three years of public ministry. He faced-off with the devil at the beginning of his ministry during his 40-day fast in the wilderness and at the end of his ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane. The story of Jesus’ “temptation in the wilderness” is recorded in *Luke 4:1-13*. Here are the temptations and Jesus’ responses:

Temptations	Responses
<i>“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” (vs.3)</i>	<i>“It is written: Man does not live on bread alone.” (vs.4)</i>
The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, <i>“I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” (vs.6)</i>	Jesus replied, <i>“It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” (vs.8)</i>
The devil took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and said: <i>“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.” (vs.9)</i> (And your angels will catch you so you don’t hurt yourself.)	Jesus answered: <i>“It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (vs.12)</i>
<i>“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.” (vs.13)</i>	

Discuss: In what ways was the devil tempting Jesus to take the easy way out? In what ways are you also tempted to take short-cuts, sell-out for success, or put God to the test? How did Jesus overcome the temptations he faced?

Read: The Apostle Paul also faced temptation and testing from Satan during his long years of ministry. He was flogged, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, hungry, thirsty, sleepless, threatened, accused and imprisoned. (For example, see *II Corinthians 11:16-33*.)

Paul describes another kind of suffering known as his “thorn in the flesh.”

*“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”
*II Corinthians 12:7-9a**

In his letter to the Romans, Paul laments a constant internal spiritual battle that also challenges every Christian:

*“For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” *Romans 7:18b-20**

Discuss: Why do ongoing health issues often feel like a torment from Satan himself? Have you every asked God to take some suffering away in your life and received a different answer than you wanted?

Why can't we be better people and accomplish more of the good things we desire to do?

Read: The Greek word for Satan is “o’diabolos” which means the obstructor, the devil. It’s the same root word that translates “diabolical.” That’s what Satan does. He obstructs us through various diabolical evil strategies that discourage us from trusting God completely. Other names for Satan mentioned in the Bible include “tempter, accuser, enemy, thief, prince of demons, roaring lion, god of this age, ruler of this world, father of lies, serpent and deceiver.”

In *Revelation 12:7-9* we find some clues regarding Satan’s origin. They suggest that he is a rebel angel who sought to make himself greater than God.

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this scripture and others like it:

- Satan is not a power or force opposite and equal to God.
- Satan is a rebel who was kicked out of heaven.
- Satan is a spiritual being who remains in active rebellion against God and has leadership over other spiritual beings that the Bible calls demons.
- The Bible doesn't dwell on Satan but he is acknowledged as a reality throughout.
- Jesus believed in Satan. He was tempted by him. He frequently cast-out demons and challenged evil in the world as personified by the devil.
- The devil's tactics are subtle and deceptive.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10 (Following the ways of Satan leads to death. Following the ways of Jesus leads to life.)

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” II Corinthians 4:4 (Spiritual blindness! Do you know someone who has it?)

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” I Peter 5:8-9 (Satan is on the prowl looking for the opportune time to pounce! When are you most vulnerable?)

Discuss: Which of the following words most accurately describe your experience of Satan... tempter, deceiver, accuser?

Read: Paul begins the last major section of his letter to the Ephesians with a “call to arms!” He says:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” Eph. 6:10-13

Like the coach of a championship football team, Paul offers both a “defensive” and an “offensive” strategy. He begins:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” (vs.10)

To be ***“strong in the Lord”*** most likely refers to what already belongs to us through the cross of Christ. This is our strength... the fact that we have been redeemed, reconciled and reclaimed by Jesus... the fact that ***“in the Lord”*** there is complete unity. We could paraphrase Paul’s words, “Act upon the truths I’ve just taught you and you will be strong!”

The word **“stand”** is used three times in this brief section and again at the beginning of *vs.14*. The Ephesians had been sinking... imitating the world instead of God... continuing to live in darkness rather than the light of Christ. Paul says, ***“take your stand,” “stand your ground,” “stand,” “stand firm.”*** He is a pastor exhorting his young congregation to remain true to the Gospel message. That’s the “defensive” strategy. To be ***“strong in the Lord”*** is to secure the base camp.

There’s also an “offensive” strategy! Paul says, ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”*** To move in ***“his mighty power”*** is to march forward and seek the transformation of our cities and nations! It is to take hold of our authority to knock down every ***“dividing wall of hostility”*** that has kept us weak and ineffective. It is the **“Go”** of the Great Commission of *Matthew 28:16-20*.

That’s why Paul goes on to say, ***“Put on the full armor of God”*** so that you can take on the ***“spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** To put on armor is to prepare for battle. For this to happen, the Church of Jesus Christ must be both ***“strong”*** and ***“mighty.”*** Our calling was never to hunker-down in fear until the rapture comes. No, we have been sent out to win the victory in Jesus’ name.

Discuss: Give an example of where you were called to ***“stand your ground”*** this past week. Give an example of where you were called to shift from “defense” to “offense” in order to be a witness for Christ.

Read: Paul says that this battle is not only here on earth but with the ***“spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** The Bible speaks of three heavens. The first is the earth’s atmosphere. The third is where God dwells. The second is where Satan and his demons hang-out. We don’t have time for a detailed study, however, we see this reality operating as “the 72” returned from their assignment in Luke 10 and reported the results to Jesus. Read together:

“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He (Jesus) replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’”
Luke 10:17-20

Several observations:

- As the disciples implemented Jesus' teaching that we now refer to as Prayer Evangelism (**Luke 10:5-9**), they had success. They returned joyfully. It was a positive experience. We can all be encouraged!
- While they were "out on tour" Jesus was watching them "in the Spirit." What did he observe? Their actions were bringing down spiritual strongholds. Demons submitted. Satan fell down. Scorpions and snakes, representing demons whose cover was now blown, were "trampled on" indicating their total defeat.
- The disciples' names are now known in heaven. What heaven? Jesus had not yet been crucified nor resurrected. There was not yet a "Book of Life." I believe that the disciples' names were written in the second heaven where the spiritual forces of evil dwell and plot their diabolical strategies. They now had "spiritual authority" and "spiritual recognition" in the heavenly realms that caused demons to run for cover!

What was the key to the disciples' success? First and foremost, their success had to do with their obedience to Jesus and his authority which was transferred to them. However, at the heart of Jesus teaching, there is something revolutionary.

Everywhere they went the disciples spoke **peace** and brought a **blessing**! They entered these towns and villages with the "opposite spirit" of Satan, who always brings **division** and a **curse**. When we approach others in a spirit of peace with a desire to bless them and minister to their deepest needs in the name of Jesus, we have the power to break spiritual strongholds. Here's why.

In *Ephesians 4:27*, Paul says:

"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin.' Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."
Ephesians 4:25-27

Anger that is not resolved gives the devil a "**foothold**" into our lives. Often there are physical, emotional and spiritual ramifications.

Quote:

"To understand how this works, it is crucial to realize that the devil cannot hurt us with just one move; instead, *he needs two moves*. Satan's first move is to cause someone to hurt us badly enough that we let the sun set on our resulting anger. When we do this, we give room to the devil (see Eph. 4:27). Then he promptly moves in, walking right into our own camp, with full capability to harm us, because *we have given him the opportunity to do so.*" (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.81)

Discuss: Give an example of where you let your anger build up, and in doing so, gave the devil a “*foothold*” in you life.

Read: Consider the social gaps, the “*dividing walls*” that have been a part of this Enemies No More series; **racial, denominational, relational, generational, societal.** At the root of every gap... barrier... dividing wall... there is **anger**, and at the root of anger, there is **sin**. Our effectiveness to engage in spiritual warfare with invisible powers is greatly compromised when anger and hostility are allowed to remain entrenched in the Church and the world.

Paul instructs Christians everywhere to make “peace in the city” before making “war in the heavenlies.” Here’s a key insight: Paul did not introduce the principles of spiritual warfare until he had first taught the Ephesians how to knock down the “*dividing walls of hostility*” that were tearing them apart.

Here’s the good news! If our unresolved anger against others provides an access point to Satan, then speaking “peace and blessing” to those that caused us to be angry should cancel any such jurisdiction. That’s why it’s so important that we don’t “give anger a foothold” if we desire to break through and see our cities and nations transformed.

Paul gives very similar counsel to the Christians in Rome:

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of Peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Romans 16:17-20

Quote:

“This verse opened my eyes to a monumental mistake we had been making in spiritual warfare: *We rated war higher than peace.* It is not the God of war but the God of *peace* who crushes Satan, and He does it under *our* feet, hence the need for us to walk in peace. Jesus has defeated the devil already. He did that at Calvary. Now we are to march on the ground where Satan lies defeated by the blood shed at the Cross; and as we walk in peace, we step on the fallen foe and God crushes his head under our feet.” (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.83)

Transformation Church Insights:

- The only answer to the “power outage” in the Christian Church today is a “power surge” by the Holy Spirit.
- Satan is a spiritual being who remains in active rebellion against the purposes and people of God.
- The devil’s tactics are usually subtle and deceptive.
- To be “*strong in the Lord*” is to secure our base camp. To move in “*his mighty power*” is to “*Go*” in Jesus’ name seeking the transformation of our cities and nations.
- The “*dividing walls of hostility*” discussed in Ephesians represent “*strongholds*” of anger and sin that have given the devil “*footholds*” in the Church and in our communities. These must be knocked down in Jesus’ name!

Transformed Living

(40 minutes)

Read: Imagine Paul gazing out a small window in his jail cell in Rome as he penned his Epistle to the Ephesians. The sight of Roman soldiers dressed for battle would have been a common occurrence. These fighting men were considered the best equipped in the world. The purpose of armor was not just to protect a soldier from a surprise attack and the possibility of a mortal wound, but to allow him the time and opportunity to respond and deal a death blow to his enemy. Paul captures this image as he instructs Christians to “***put on the full armor of God.***” He exhorts:

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Eph. 6:17

There are six very important pieces of armor that must be worn by believers who intend to “***stand firm***” and ultimately defeat and trample upon the enemy in Jesus’ name. Let’s briefly consider the “***full armor of God:***”

“... belt of truth”

In Paul’s day it was the custom for both men and women to wear long, flowing garments. Before any strenuous physical activity could take place it was necessary to tuck these robes into a belt, sometimes called a girdle. Thus, the term “gird your loins.” Paul describes this piece of equipment as the “***belt of truth.***” He implies that if we don’t renounce every sin and dishonest way in our lives, they will eventually trip us up. This involves both our relationship with God and with one another:

“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.” Psalms 51:6 (Transparency leads to intimacy.)

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” I Peter 2:1-2 (The opposite of truth is deceit and hypocrisy. These deceptions can keep us from growing-up in Christ.)

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31b-32 (We put on the “***belt of truth***” when we submit our lives to Jesus and receive the free gift of salvation.)

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” *Johns 1:14* (Grace and truth are a “dynamic duo” in the arsenal of a Christian’s witness.)

Discuss: Which takes the most energy... to live truthfully or to live a lie? Why?

Reflect personally: For you to put on the “*belt of truth,*” who do you need to come clean with? Self? God? Someone specific?

Next in this list of the “*full armor of God*” comes:

“... the breastplate of righteousness”

This refers to Christ’s righteousness. Paul had practiced the Jewish law and its regulations to the letter. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, everything changed.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” *Philippians 3:7-9* (No amount of success or good works can ever earn righteousness. Righteousness implies forgiveness and salvation. These gifts are given freely by God to all who come by faith in Jesus Christ.)

“For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” *Romans 1:17* (Christians wear righteousness like a banner of identity. To wear it as a breastplate is to declare that our strength is in the Lord!)

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” *Matthew 6:33* (When we give first priority to our relationship with God, our deepest needs are met.)

Discuss: Getting “right” with God is not something we can accomplish by our own effort. Why do so many of us keep living as though salvation and forgiveness depended on us rather than coming to Christ in faith?

The third piece of God’s armor requires that:

“...your feet are fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”

Roman soldiers were equipped with strong sandals. This made them a highly mobile army that was able to cover great distances each day. When we put on a pair of shoes or sandals it is because we are preparing to walk. We don’t wear our shoes to bed!

The ***“readiness that comes from the gospel of peace”*** implies that Christians are to be prepared at all times to share the message of the Gospel. We are not just to walk, but to walk in peace. We are to be “peacemakers” in a world that is divided by anger and conflict. This “opposite spirit,” as discussed earlier in this session, is a powerful and affective strategy to crush Satan under our feet.

Almost 800 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah declared:

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah 52:7 (Do you have beautiful feet?)

“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Psalms 110:1 (Your victory over the power of Satan comes from the LORD.)

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Eph. 1:22-23 (Because of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, all things in heaven and on earth must now submit to his authority.)

“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” James 3:18 (When we sow peace instead of division we get kingdom results.)

Quote:

“I submit to you that one of the greatest mistakes made in spiritual warfare literature and in practice has been to overlook the power of walking in peace – a weapon truly capable of removing the devil from our midst. What we have foolishly chosen instead is hand-to-hand combat. Any commando will tell you that hand-to-hand combat is the most dangerous way to fight a war. That is why it is crucial that we make our ultimate objective changing the spiritual climate and not just haphazardly praying for our neighbors.” (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p. 87)

Discuss: Which do you prefer, shoes or sandals? How has God been “fitting you” through this Enemies No More series to walk more effectively as a witness for the ***“gospel of peace?”***

Read: Next, Paul says:

“... take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

The shield of a Roman soldier was a large and strong piece of battle gear. It was so heavy that sometimes another man served as a “shield bearer.” A soldier had to be able to crouch beneath his shield and have it protect his entire body from the flaming arrows of the enemy. It literally provided a “canopy of protection” from such an attack.

Paul describes the “*shield of faith*” in a similar way. When it comes to “spiritual warfare,” it is our faith in Jesus Christ that serves as our shield of protection from the fiery attacks of Satan. Our “shield bearer” is Jesus. And notice that as a result of our “*standing firm*” in truth, righteousness and peace, Satan is relegated to firing from a distance. He knows that his defeat is imminent and that he is no match for the Gospel of peace!

The shepherd boy David, who would later become King David, demonstrated the power of “spiritual warfare” in his classic showdown with the mighty Goliath. Read together from *I Samuel 17:41-47*:

“Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, ‘Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?’ And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ‘Come here,’ he said, ‘and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.’

David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.’”

The Lord gave David victory that day. He was protected by a “*shield of faith*.” Be encouraged that whatever battles you may be fighting right now, God will be your shield, your strong deliverer, and give you the victory!

“O LORD, I say to you, ‘You are my God. Hear, O LORD, my cry for mercy. O Sovereign LORD, my strong deliverer, who shields my head in the day of battle – do not grant the wicked their desires, O LORD; do not let their plans succeed, or they will become proud.’” Psalms 140:6-8

“Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.” Psalms 144:1-2

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2

Discuss: Describe a “flaming arrow” that has been shot at you recently? How did you defend yourself?

Read: Next, to dress ourselves in the “*full armor of God*” we are to:

“... take the helmet of salvation”

In the same way that the “*breastplate of righteousness*” protects our heart, the “*helmet of salvation*” protects our mind. We are to “take it” and “put it on.” It’s like a bike helmet or motorcycle helmet. When they are worn, they save lives!

“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I Thessalonians 5:8-9

The “*helmet of salvation*” represents more than our “ticket to heaven.” The scripture says:

“... work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2:12b (Another way to say it would be, “Always consider how the gift of salvation relates to your daily life.”)

Jesus said,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37 (Christianity does not require that you “check” your brain at the door!)

When Jesus rebuked Peter, he said,

“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Mark 8:33 (Satan loves to compete for control of our thought life. He has other things in mind for us.)

The first Christians were described by Luke this way:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind.” Acts 4:32a (True unity involves both the head and the heart.)

Paul himself declared:

“...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” Romans 8:7

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2a (Transformation involves a change in our way of believing, thinking and acting. It is a process of renewal.)

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” I Corinthians 1:10 (The “*helmet of salvation*” reminds us that our unity rests upon our common experience of the love and grace of God. We must agree to keep “first things first.”)

Discuss: Describe some of the battles being fought in culture today for control of the mind.

In what ways can your mind and your rational thought process keep you from going deeper with God?

Read: The final piece of our “spiritual armor” involves taking:

“... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Every part of the armor of God can serve in both a “defensive” and an “offensive” capacity. However, the “*sword of the Spirit*” is clearly an “offensive” weapon meant to be driven through the heart of the enemy. If “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” stays buried in its sheath, or hangs mounted on a wall, it doesn’t represent much of a threat. But when we wield the sword of the Spirit in Jesus’ name, it will do some “big time” damage.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” Hebrews 4:12 (The word of God is “*living and active*” because the Holy Spirit breathes life in it and through it!)

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26 (God’s Word speaks truth into the most resistant of hearts and minds.)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” II Timothy 3:16 (The “*double-edged sword*” of the word of God is that it both declares the Gospel of salvation and also teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us to live the Christian faith as transformed followers of Jesus.)

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31 (Our testimony will not be very “sharp” unless the word of God within us is energized by the power of the Holy Spirit.)

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Ephesians 3:16 (Spiritual warfare begins in us – then we move out to the world!”

Discuss: Is the word of God “*living and active*” in your life, or has “*the sword of the Spirit*” been relegated to the sheath or the shelf?

How has this Life Group study helped encourage you to make the scriptures “*useful*” in your daily life?

Read: The “*full armor of God*” is the standard equipment issue for every believer in order to help us “*take our stand*.”

“... against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Eph. 6:12b

Our goal is not just to protect and defend. Our goal is to see Satan fall and trample on every demon represented by the “*dividing walls of hostility*” in our world today. The image of armor reminds us that these battles are fought in the trenches of everyday life by everyday Christians. Paul’s words are for the whole Church and everyone in it. We are already promised the victory!

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those are sanctified by faith in me.” Acts 26:16-18 (Paul recounted the experience of his conversion and “calling” as he shared his witness before a king.)

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.” I Corinthians 16:13

“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD.” Proverbs 21:31

Discuss: Share a victory that is needed in your life right now!

Transformation Church Insights

- To “*stand firm*” we must be “*strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*”
- The “*full armor of God*” has both “defensive” and “offensive” dimensions.
- The “*gospel of peace*” is our most effective weapon to tear down strongholds of anger and division.
- Every piece of spiritual armor represents a gift from our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The victory over Satan and his evil forces is already won! We can live and love and serve in total confidence!

Life Application Challenges

(10 minutes)

Read: Your Life Application Challenges this week will encourage you to continue to grow in Christ by putting on the **“full armor of God.”** Read this section together and clarify any questions from your Life Group.

Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this week is to highlight or underline in your personal Bible all of the scripture passages used in Session 7.

These verses will be especially helpful in reminding you of your authority in Christ to take on the **“spiritual forces of evil”** in the world. This challenge will also provide you with further time to review, reflect and pray. If you do not prefer to highlight or underline verses in your Bible, just focus on re-reading the passages and reflecting upon their personal application for your life.

You see, while this section in *Ephesians 6:10-17* on the **“full armor of God”** is a favorite because it is so strikingly visual, it is the application that counts!

So, along with your **Daily Devotions, Prayer, and Memory Verse Challenge**, please find some extra minutes to go back through the lesson and let these truths from God’s Word really sink in. You can be certain that you will experience greater peace and confidence in facing the challenges of your week.

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge is to agree to **“take a stand”** together in prayer regarding a **“spiritual stronghold”** in your city or region.

I believe that someone in your Life Group will be able to identify such a **“stronghold”** because they have found themselves right in the middle of it through their involvement in business, education, government or a community organization.

This challenge will provide an opportunity to be conscious of putting on the **“full armor of God”** as you intercede in the name of Jesus and by his authority. Agree to **“take your stand”** in the Spirit, especially by praying and speaking peace into the situation. Remember that any time there is unresolved anger, in people or institutions, it provides a **“foothold”** for the devil. By speaking peace you can begin to exercise your authority in Jesus to knock down these **“dividing walls of hostility.”**

As you pray throughout the week you will know that you are doing so together with your fellow Life Group members. Unity in the Spirit is an important component of “spiritual warfare.” You may consider getting together at some other time during the week just to pray as a group. You may choose to gather with a few friends over coffee or lunch and spend some time in prayer. Or, you could gather at church with the Prayer Team or with your Life Group to really go deep in prayer and intercession.

Take a few minutes right now to talk it through as a Life Group. Pause and pray if you would like. What ***“spiritual stronghold”*** can you identify as a group that you will all agree to pray for this week? Write it down here.

Take notes as you pray throughout the week so that as the Lord brings insights you will remember to share with the whole group next week.

In *Ephesians 3:10-12*, Paul offers us great encouragement in Christ. He says:

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”

You are the Church! His intent is to make known his purposes in Christ to every evil spirit. So approach God this week with freedom and confidence!

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge this week is to walk through your days with ***“your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Eph. 6:15***

In other words, wherever you go, whatever you do, be ready... be “on duty” for the Lord... be prepared to speak peace and share the love of Christ in every situation.

Sometimes that love is shared silently; sometimes with words. Let the Holy Spirit direct your paths. Ask God to provide you with “divine appointments” that will provide you with opportunities to be the “hands and feet” of Jesus. Have fun!

Document any highlights that you might want to share with your Life Group next week.

Prayer Support

(15 minutes)

Every week you will be encouraged to take a few moments to share personal prayer requests within your group. Go ahead and do that now. You may write them down here:

Now, close with a group prayer for these needs and continue to include them in your prayers throughout the week.

Details

(5 minutes)

Finalize any details with your Host/Leader and Life Group members. Remember to share responsibilities, especially refreshments and childcare as needed.

Our next Life Group Session is:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Remember to bring:

Memory Verse Challenge

Ephesians 6:10

“Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

Daily Devotions

Read: This week we learned that the *“sword of the Spirit”* is *“the word of God.” Eph. 6:17.* Take this to heart as you read, reflect and pray on the scriptures below. Be encouraged to *“stand firm”* on the amazing truth and authority of the scriptures. Always pray for Holy Spirit to illuminate your reading with insight and application for your personal life. Be blessed!

Day One – I Thessalonians 4:13-18

What are some of the “ignorant” things people believe today about death, life after death and how you get to heaven? What can you learn from this scripture about life after death? Why is it important that we comfort and encourage one another with these words?

Day Two – I John 4:1-6

How are we to “test the spirits” to determine what is true and what is false? A faithful testimony about Jesus will acknowledge that he is both divine and human, fully God and fully man. The “spirit of the antichrist” will claim to be God in order to deceive the world. How does Christ help us be “overcomers?”

Day Three – II Peter 3:8-18

God is patient so that everyone will have an opportunity to hear the Gospel, repent and be saved. And yet, the “day of the Lord will come like a thief.” vs.10 Why is it important that we “be on guard?” How have you been growing in “grace and knowledge” of Jesus Christ?

Day Four – I Corinthians 10:1-13

What can we learn from the history of Israel that applies to our relationship with God today? Why can pride or over-confidence set us up for a fall? vs.12 What comfort are we given as we face temptation? Have you experienced this provision?

Day Five – Romans 12:12-21

What stands out in this teaching from Paul that has special application for knocking down *“dividing walls of hostility?”* Now identify similar connections with a lifestyle of Prayer Evangelism.

Day Six – Philippians 3:12-21

In what part of your life do you want to “press in” for more of Jesus? What sins and hurts from the past need to be released before you can move forward in response to God’s call? In what way is your “citizenship” really found in heaven? What are the implications for your life on earth?

Day Seven – Your Life Group meets today!