

Semicontinuous  
**1 Kgs. 8:22–30,**  
**41–43**  
**Ps. 84**

Complementary  
**Josh. 24:1–2a,**  
**14–18**  
**Ps. 34:15–22**

**Eph. 6:10–20**  
**John 6:56–69**

# Put on the Armor of God

**Goal for the Session**      *Adults will identify what is needed to be strong against the forces of evil and proclaim the gospel of peace.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Ephesians 6:10–20

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Aaron L. Utti

Putting on the whole armor of God is linked to evangelism. Prayer is vital in this work. The church has been created to proclaim the mystery of the gospel to the world and to the powers (3:10). The mystery begins with Israel as a “peculiar” people (2:12). It discloses God’s plan “to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10); it is demonstrated in making one people of Jew and Gentile. Anyone making such “offensive” proclamations will be confronted by the powers. It takes courage—and prayer—for anyone publicly to preach the offense of the gospel.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Haruko Nawata Ward

There are examples of Christians who have taken up the “warfare of peace.” Christians in the French village of Le Chambon sur Ligno hid and protected 5,000 Jewish children in World War II. Martin Luther King Jr. preached the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31) of love and nonviolent protest. The message to the Ephesians is clear that in the middle of our fierce fighting, Christians bring the gospel of peace (6:15), and “the whole armor of God” is only for their protection (v. 13).

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Archie Smith Jr.

Standing firm means that one is willing to debate, listen, and consider alternatives in order to reach a beneficial goal, while at the same time not sacrificing basic principles. Martin Luther King Jr. stood firm on nonviolence. Margaret Sanger, the twentieth-century suffragette, stood firm on women’s rights. Nelson Mandela stood firm and resolute against apartheid. Representative Barbara Lee stood firm against the war in Iraq. Robert Sobukwe stood firm as he faced the evils of imprisonment under apartheid. All stood firm against injustice. The lesson we draw from them is that to have a strong ego, a concern for justice and compassion, is to be grounded in the convictions of the community and open to critical evaluation. This is how we stand firm, as Paul counsels.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Peter Rhea Jones

Just one day after France surrendered to Nazi Germany, a pastor preached to a small village congregation with a prophetic vision that “The responsibility of Christians is to resist the violence that will be brought to bear on their consciences through the weapons of the spirit.” These Huguenots would provide sanctuary for 5,000 Jews. They discovered the Pauline “weapons of the Spirit.” Christians can be awakened to weapons of the Spirit such as prayer (v. 18), Christian truth (v. 14), and the Spirit (v. 17b). The most potent idea to take away from this text may be the gathered community’s heightened awareness of the “weapons of the spirit” available to the Christian church.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**  
*Ephesians 6:10–20*

## Focus on Your Teaching

Many adults are uncomfortable using militaristic terms and imagery in Christian song and theology. “Onward Christian Soldiers” has disappeared from most denominational hymnals. Yet, most would agree that evil is a real presence in the world and their faith should equip them to do something about it. Today’s session discusses ways Christians might just do that and arm themselves to proclaim the gospel of peace. Talk of weaponry and violence may be troubling to some participants, while others may advocate violence as a necessary response to the world’s problems. Some people may feel despair at the enormity of the task of facing evil. Be sensitive to the range of opinions and emotions this passage evokes.

*God, use me to help others know you. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- images from news magazines or the Internet
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- paper
- pens
- board or newsprint
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 30, 2015

### For Responding

- option 1: newsprint or board from Exploring, paper, pens
- option 2: newsprint or board from Exploring, paper, pens or markers
- option 3: board or newsprint, marker, index cards, pens

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, collect images from news magazines or the Internet that depict situations of conflict or evil in the world. Post them around the room or on a table, or project them where participants can see them.

Greet participants and introduce visitors.

Ask for volunteers who attended the last session to report back on how they found ways to praise God and practice thankfulness during the week. Invite participants to say what effect this practice had in their lives. Invite others to respond.

Ask for participants to look at the images of conflict and select one that is especially troubling to them (it does not matter if several people select the same one). Invite volunteers to explain their reactions to the image they selected and describe what feelings it evokes. Relate that today’s session is about how God equips Christians to stand up to situations of conflict and evil.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

*We thank and praise you, God, for our community. Open our hearts to hear your Word. Amen.*

### EXPLORING

Tell the participants that they will read Ephesians 6:10–20 as a group, going around the circle and having each person read one verse until the Scripture is completed. Ask participants to heavily emphasize the imperative verbs in the reading by saying them louder. Explain that imperative verbs are verbs that give commands—such as *go*, *be strong*, and *put on*—and that almost every verse of the focus scripture contains an imperative verb. After the reading, invite general reactions.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Armor of God) and allow several minutes for participants to read it in silence. Ask participants if and how this helps them hear the focus scripture.

Instead of drawing the soldier on a piece of newsprint or board, allow participants to draw their own images and symbols on pieces of paper. They can then take these home to remember.

Draw an outline of a soldier on the board or newsprint, and beginning with verse 14, label each of the parts with the symbols the author ascribes to the belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword. Draw flaming arrows and label them “evil one.”

Have participants study the image with the words and pretend they are the original hearers of these verses living in the world described by the resource sheet. Discuss:

- ✂ How might you find these verses comforting and encouraging as original hearers?
- ✂ How does the fact that it is written by Paul in prison affect your response?

*Apartheid* (“apart-hood” or “separateness”) was the institutionalized racial segregation enforced by the white Afrikaner government against blacks in South Africa. Officially enacted in 1948, it ended in 1994 when peace activist Nelson Mandela won the presidential election.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Ephesians 6:10–20). Have a volunteer read the “Where?” excerpt aloud. Again, invite participants to pretend they are the original hearers of this letter, living in a context where armored soldiers threaten them. Have participants turn to their neighbor and explain to that person how they, as Christians, use this armor image to show that Christians bring the gospel of peace and that the armor is only for their spiritual protection. After a few minutes invite a few pairs to tell the group what they said.

As a transition to Responding, have participants read the “So What?” excerpt and briefly remind one another who the people were who are mentioned in it. Discuss as a group what these people might have labeled their spiritual armor that enabled them to resist forces of evil and proclaim the gospel of peace.

**EASY  
PREP**

## RESPONDING

1. **Journaling** Ephesians reassures Christians that Christ empowers the church to stand up to evil. This activity will help participants identify what character strengths and skills they possess and can develop with God’s help. Distribute paper and pens. Invite participants to reflect on the labeled armor on newsprint or the board and also recall the spiritual armor just mentioned at the end of Exploring. Give them ten minutes to journal. Ask them to identify which characteristics they possess, what strengths they have, and to list situations in which they could use these strengths, with God’s help. Invite participants to tell about their strengths and to say how they will commit to using these strengths in coming weeks.
2. **What Can the Church Do?** Ephesians says that Christ equips the church to stand against evil. This activity will help participants evaluate the church’s armor to proclaim the gospel of peace. Distribute paper and pens or markers. Review the newsprint characteristics of armor found in Ephesians 6:10–20 and recall the list of characteristics just generated at the end of Exploring. Invite participants to draw their own image of a church equipped with various characteristics that enable it to resist evil and proclaim peace. They might use an image like the soldier or draw a church image and label parts

of a building with characteristics. After a few minutes invite people to show and explain their drawings. Generate a list of characteristics a church must do well and take it to the pastor or leaders for a discussion.

- 3. Proclaiming the Gospel of Peace** Ephesians is clear that Christians are expected to face conflict and that God equips them with the protection they need. This activity follows from the one in Gathering, when participants looked at images of conflict, in order to help generate practical ways they can respond with peace to violence and evil.

Draw a line down the middle of a piece of newsprint or the board. Title the left side “Conflicts.” Invite participants to identify local, national, or international places of conflict. They may use the images from Gathering to prompt ideas or come up with other ideas. List their responses.

Title the right side of the newsprint “Gospel of Peace.” Ask participants to suggest how Christians might help bring peace to each of the situations listed and write them on the right side.

Hand out index cards and have participants write on their card at least one conflict and a means of bringing peace that they will commit to pursuing in the coming weeks.

## CLOSING

If the group used option 3 in Responding, have participants reflect silently on the conflict they wrote on their index card and the response they intend to practice in coming weeks. Invite a period of silent prayer in which participants offer their feelings and hopes to God.

If the group did not use option 3, ask participants to think of one conflict they might face in coming weeks and to name one piece of armor they will use to bring the gospel of peace to that conflict. Invite a few volunteers to tell what they will do.

Offer the following prayer, or one of your choosing:

*God of might and peace, help us have the courage to put on your protective armor so that we can bring the gospel of peace to others. Gather us as a loving community in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 30, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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## The Armor of God

The letter to the Ephesians describes Christians' call to resist the spiritual powers of evil (6:12) and to proclaim the "gospel of peace" (6:15).



If the objective is peace, and if the enemy is not flesh and blood, why does the letter to the Ephesians evoke imagery of armor, shields, and swords? Ephesus and other cities of the Roman Empire were accustomed to the presence of Roman soldiers clad in armor and bearing shields, spears, and swords. Soldiers were stationed all over the empire as peacekeeping forces to quell disturbances and uprisings. Soldiers and centurions show up several times in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 8:5–13; 27:27–37; Luke 3:14; 7:1–10; John 18:3; 19:1–37; Acts 12:1–11; 21:27–36).

Ephesians draws on imagery of a military power that was perceived as invincible in that time and place and uses it as a metaphor for spiritual armor. While this spiritual armor did not defend against a flesh and blood enemy, it did provide the early Christians something ultimately more powerful: the faith, hope, and inner strength necessary to resist evil and proclaim the gospel of peace in an evil and violent world. Paul sometimes refers to his faithful co-workers as "fellow soldiers" (Philippians 2:25; Philemon 1:2).

For the early Christians, the concept of spiritual warfare was very real and compelling. Most people in the first century, both Jews and Gentiles, believed that the devil, evil spirits, and other cosmic powers caused war, disease, starvation, and all manner of suffering. God and the heavenly host waged continual warfare against these cosmic powers of evil (6:11–12). The Gospels illustrate this belief in accounts of Jesus' defeating the devil and evil spirits (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:23–27; 5:1–20; Luke 4:1–13), and Paul affirms that the love of Christ overcomes the "powers" and "principalities" that threaten to separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38–39).

Today, not all Christians believe literally in the devil or demonic spirits, but most Christians affirm that evil is a very real and malevolent presence in the world. The letter to the Ephesians assures Christians that they are equipped with spiritual "armor" (6:10–17) to stand up to evil, to overcome despair and darkness that at times seem overwhelming, and to proclaim the gospel of peace.