

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**

Standing Firm

Goal for the Session Youth will employ the resources God provides for them to live faithfully.

■ 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

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ variety of protective gear (knee and elbow pads for sports, protective gloves, goggles, bike helmet)
- ❑ Bibles
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ❑ Internet access (optional)

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, markers
- ❑ option 2: current newspapers and newsmagazines, writing paper, envelopes, stamps, addresses for chaplains and overseas workers in your denomination involved in peacekeeping
- ❑ option 3: variety of art materials (card stock, different kinds of paper, markers, pastels, acrylic paints and brushes) and craft materials (craft sticks, pipe cleaners, buttons, glass beads, yarn, craft foam, fabric scraps)

For Web Connection

- ❑ Internet access

Focus on Your Teaching

Youth face many choices and challenges in their daily lives, from peer pressure to conflict in relationships to complex moral decisions. They will have a variety of ways of finding strength when facing difficult situations. One of those ways can be through their discussions in youth group. Leaders in youth ministry have often found that youth are more invested in participating when ideas can be discussed in the context of their own issues. This week's epistle reading offers practical "resources of the spirit" that can equip and strengthen youth to live faithfully. The group can also be a source of support and encouragement.

O God, may the youth feel the support of this community strengthening them to live faithfully. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Greet youth as they arrive. Gather around the protective gear and invite youth to play a game related to the items. Have everyone sit in a circle and pass one of the items around the circle until you clap your hands. The person holding the item at that time has to name four things about the item (such as what it is made of, who would use it, why it would be used, what else could be done with it). Continue until all items have been passed around the circle and/or all have had a turn describing an item.

Explain that just like these items protect and strengthen our physical bodies, there are things that can equip and strengthen our spiritual life. Pray:

O God, thank you for the people in this community who help us to live our lives faithfully. Amen.

EXPLORING

Recall that the focus scripture for the previous session was from the letter to the Ephesians, one of the early Christian communities led by followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection. During those times, much of the Mediterranean world was under Roman occupation. The presence of Roman soldiers in every town and village was a common sight and everyone had to submit to Roman authority. As this also meant worshipping the emperor as if he was a god, something that Christians couldn't do, it was a difficult and scary time for the Christian church. Today's reading from the last chapter of Ephesians describes how Christians can equip, protect, and strengthen themselves to face challenging times.

Distribute Bibles and invite youth to take turns reading Ephesians 6:10–20 a verse at a time; those who do not wish to read can say, "Pass."

✠ What advice does the writer give to the Christians in Ephesus?

A soldier's armor (five pieces for defense, one for offense):

Belt: band of leather to provide support and place to attach equipment

Breastplate: leather or other material that covered throat, heart, lungs

Shoes: sandals with spikes to ground soldier

Shield: rectangular piece of wood, covered in wet hide to deflect flaming arrows

Helmet: animal skin reinforced with metal

Sword: short, straight Roman sword

The writer encourages the Ephesians to prepare to fight cosmic forces by putting on the armor of God. Review the information in the sidebar about military gear in biblical times. Invite youth to think about equivalent military language that might have been used in these verses if the letter had been written today.

✧ Why do you think the writer used the image of military armor?

The metaphor of “military armor” can be troubling for those who focus on Christ as the Prince of Peace. Divide verses 14–17 among the group and ask youth to rewrite each verse using nonmilitary language.

✧ How does the message sound different?

Read again verses 18–20.

✧ What do these verses say is the most important thing that can help people as they do Christ's work?

✧ How do you think prayer can help us face “the forces of evil” (v. 12)?

The letter to the Ephesians encourages us to stand firm for what we believe in. One of the ways to describe “standing firm” is that you keep trying to make changes, even when it is really hard, without sacrificing your basic principles. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Standing Firm) and read the story together. If possible, view one or more of the video clips.

✧ What do you think helped Malala to stand firm?

We all face difficult situations in our lives when we try to live in God's way. In *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible, verse 13 says: “Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued.”

✧ What are some situations today where God's way is in conflict with the ways of the world?

✧ Where can we find strength to work for truth and justice and peace in the world?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- Spiritual Warriors** Youth will employ the resources God provides for them to live faithfully by considering the spiritual armor they can use. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Spiritual Warrior) and invite youth to follow the instructions for designing tools for doing God's work. Compare drawings as a group and talk together about some of the times when they needed to be spiritual warriors, standing firm against an injustice.
- Letters to Peacekeepers** Youth will employ the resources God provides for them to live faithfully by writing letters of support for peacekeepers. Ephesians 6:15 speaks of putting on the “shoes . . . to proclaim the gospel of peace.” Review newspapers and newsmagazines, noting the places of conflict and talk together about the role of a peacekeeper, noting work done by people in your denomination. Distribute writing paper and information and addresses and help youth write their letters of support. Address the envelopes and arrange to mail the letters.

Option: If there is a military base in your community with people involved in peacekeeping, consider sending letters to these individuals.

3. **Power Symbols** Youth will employ the resources God provides for them to live faithfully by making a reminder symbol. Have them look again at Ephesians 6:10–20, making a list of the words and phrases that describe the spiritual resources that God offers. Provide a variety of art and craft materials and invite youth to choose items to use in creating a symbol that represents a word or phrase from the reading. This symbol can serve as a reminder of the spiritual resources they can use to follow in God’s way.

Option: Write the phrases on strips of paper for youth to read aloud.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle. Invite youth to take turns holding a pose and offering support to each other by proclaiming the following sentences:

- “Stand firm against evil!”
- “Protect yourself with God’s truth!”
- “Proclaim the gospel of peace!”
- “Wrap yourself in a shield of faith!”
- “Wear your helmet of salvation!”
- “Carry the sword of the Spirit!”

Explain that the youth group can be a place where we can pray for each other and help each other be prepared to face the challenges of daily life. Then offer the following commissioning (adapted from “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” Prayer):

*Christ be with us, Christ within us,
Christ behind us, Christ before us,
Christ beside us, Christ to win us,
Christ to comfort and restore us.
Christ beneath us, Christ above us,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love us,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. Amen.*

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

Many of the letters written to the first Christians emphasize the need to pray and keep praying. Praying is still one of the best resources of the spirit to help equip and strengthen us to live faithfully. Prayers can help youth express their joys and longings as well as their concerns about the future, justice, natural disasters, and ethical dilemmas. Many online resources offer ideas for prayers and for praying.

Versions of the prayer that Jesus taught: rainbowcathedral.wordpress.com/prayers/

Prayers from around the world: www.worldprayers.org/

Some ideas on different ways to pray: <http://tinyurl.com/q83vuw4>

www.rejesus.co.uk/images/pdf/h2p4-pray.pdf

Ideas for spiritual practices: <http://tinyurl.com/l9dj9vw>

Standing Firm



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Malala Yousafzai is a courageous 18-year-old advocate for universal education and girls' rights. In 2014, she shared the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest ever Nobel Prize recipient in any category. At the age of 11–12, she wrote a blog under a pseudonym for the British Broadcasting Company describing her life under Taliban rule and her views on promoting education for girls in her community. Malala was targeted for her brave activism and in October 2012, the Taliban boarded her school bus and shot her and two other girls. After the shooting, Malala was flown from her home in Pakistan to England to recover, where she lives now with her family.

On her 16th birthday in July 2013, Malala decided to take her fight for education global and she addressed the public at the United Nations for the first time since she had been shot. More than 600 of the world's young leaders representing nearly 100 different countries joined Malala at the first-ever youth takeover of the United Nations. Their purpose was to highlight the leading role that youth can play and they delivered a youth-led resolution to help all children around the world, especially girls, access their right to education. "This is an opportunity for every young person on the planet to get together and tell the world: we will get our education, be it at home, in school or any place," said Malala.

The day of the youth takeover was named "Malala Day," and each year it is a day for children and youth everywhere to stand raise their voices and be heard.

Learn more about Malala Day through her official Web site:

www.malala.org

Link to the Youth Resolution to the UN:

www.worldwewant2015.org/node/352851

Link to Malala Day video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXVLN1kTtE

Link to video of Youth takeover:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbrEK7AFxQ8

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Standing Firm

Youth
Resource Sheet 2

Spiritual Warrior

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians instructs Christians to be ready and prepared to face the challenges of the world, using the tools that God has provided. These tools are listed around the figure below. Dress this figure in spiritual armor for work in God's world, designing clothing or objects based on each of these words. For example, a "black belt of truth" or a "spirit laser."

