

FOREWORD BY
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PRAYER
COACH

*For all who want to get off the bench
and onto the praying field*

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Satan

Dress for Success

One of my favorite musicals (it's a fairly short list) is *Fiddler on the Roof*. It's the story of Tevya, a Jewish peasant who lives in a small Russian village at the beginning of the twentieth century. Tevya loves to talk to God about the problems in his life—everything from his sick milk cow to the five daughters he must marry off.

And Tevya has a rabbi who is also known for his praying. This religious teacher can rattle off a blessing for any situation in life. On one occasion he's asked: "Rabbi, is there a blessing for the tzar?" He has to think about that one for a moment. How do you pray for a dictator who is cruelly persecuting the religious group that you belong to?

But the rabbi was able to come up with a blessing. "May God bless and keep the tzar—far away from us."¹

The tzar was the beneficiary of that rabbi's prayer in the same way that Satan can be made the beneficiary of some of our praying. I'm obviously using the word *beneficiary* in a tongue-in-cheek fashion here. This term is usually used to describe an individual who

profits (benefits) in a good way from somebody else's action. But quite literally the word simply means, "one who receives." So, I'm going to suggest that it is possible for Satan to be on the receiving end of our prayers. They will definitely impact him. And, in that sense, he will be one of their beneficiaries.

Please don't argue with me theologically or linguistically on this point. You don't have to agree that "beneficiary" is the best label to pin on Satan with respect to our prayers. Just let me stretch this word to make it serve my purpose. The purpose of demonstrating the importance of prayer in our daily battle with the evil one.

This battle is described in Ephesians 6, a passage that I've already mentioned a couple of times. The believer's six-piece armor is pictured here. Have you begun to regularly pray on this protective suit yet? (This is one of the patterns that I recommended back in ch. 3.) If you haven't felt compelled to do this, it may be that you need a fuller explanation of the danger that you're in. A danger that makes the wearing of one's armor an absolute *must*. Let me summarize Paul's counsel in Ephesians 6:10–20 in the form of three warnings.

Don't Be Naïve!

There are several things, in the opening verses of this passage, that Paul cautions us not to be naïve about. The first is *our diabolical enemy*. It's always dangerous to underestimate an adversary. And this adversary is not one to be taken lightly.

But before we unmask this foe, let me remind you that Christ followers face opposition from two other sources as well. We don't want to pin all the blame for the spiritual conflict in our lives on a diabolical enemy. In fact, if we want to get a good look at the most persistent troublemaker we deal with, all we have to do is gaze into a mirror. As Pogo once said in the Sunday comics, "We have met the enemy and he is us."² The biblical term for the vexatious *enemy* that Pogo was referring to is "the flesh" (NIV: "the sinful nature"). We are, in our flesh, our own worst spiritual enemies.

Sinning has been our natural inclination for years. It's become an ingrained habit. We do it without thinking. Our inherent propensity is to disobey God. If God's Word says, "Do this" or "Don't do that," our flesh responds: "Nah! I'll just do what I want to do." Most of the spiritual battles in a Christ follower's life will be provoked by his or her own sinful nature.

Now, the good news is that once we surrender our lives to Christ, his Spirit comes to reside in us and to empower us to overcome the tyranny of our flesh. We can rebuff those internal impulses to sin. In the words of an old hymn, Jesus "breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free."³ Our sins were cancelled in a judicial sense—forgiven, wiped away—the moment we trusted Christ to save us. But now he wants to break their ongoing power to control us on a daily basis. He wants to break the power of our flesh.

Our second spiritual enemy is the world. The Bible uses this expression to refer to the influences in our social environment that prompt us to leave God's path of righteousness. The world can confront us in the form of peer pressure, or movies, or bosses' expectations, or advertising, or school textbooks. The world promotes values, priorities, and moral standards that are contrary to God's.

Sometimes our flesh and the world join forces—like in tag-team wrestling—to oppose us. For example, my sinful nature loves to covet. I always want more. Especially more stuff. The world comes along and fans that coveting into flame by providing me with a mailbox full of catalogs, friends who are always buying cool things that I now want, a local mall for my recreational shopping, and ballgames on TV that constantly break for enticing commercials.

Our flesh and the world are formidable allies. Our flesh loves to rage, so the world provides us with violent movies and aggravating motorists. Our flesh loves to lust, so the world provides us with Internet porn sites and immodestly dressed co-workers. Our flesh loves to pig out, so the world provides us with all-you-can-eat buffets and expense accounts that beg to be used.

And if this perilous collaboration between spiritual enemies one and two were not enough, Ephesians 6 tells us that spiritual en-

emy three is even more dangerous—and lurks around every corner. Paul identifies him as “the devil” (v. 11), admonishing us to put on our armor so that we can take our stand against his schemes. The devil is God’s archenemy. If we can believe in an unseen God, it should not be difficult to believe in an invisible devil. Believing in the devil does not make one a superstitious wacko.

C. S. Lewis was a die-hard atheist, teaching at both Cambridge and Oxford in the early twentieth century. When he became convinced of the truth of the Christian faith, he began to express his newfound convictions in writing. The *Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of children’s stories about a Christlike lion named Aslan, endeared Lewis to readers. But his *Screwtape Letters*, another work of fiction, was far edgier.

Lewis created an imaginary correspondence between a senior-level demon, Screwtape, and his bumbling nephew, Wormwood. He mixed great fun with biblical insight. But he made it absolutely clear that evil adversaries do actually exist. Demons are for real! And one of their strategies is to convince us that they aren’t. As Screwtape tells Wormwood: “The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of our existence begins to arise in his [i.e., the victim’s] mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he can’t believe in that (it’s an old textbook method of confusing them), he therefore cannot believe in us.”⁴

Do you believe in the devil and his cohorts? The Bible never pictures him with horns, pitchfork, and red outfit. We’re told, rather, that he was once one of God’s angels. That makes him a created being, and in no way (thankfully) equal in power to God. Motivated by pride, the devil challenged God for his job, lost the contest, and was banished from heaven. (For an Old Testament recap of these events, check out Isa. 14:12–15 and Ezek. 28:11–19, where a description of the rise and fall of the kings of Babylon and Tyre point to the bigger story of Satan.)

We must not be naïve to the schemes of this diabolical enemy, the apostle Paul warns us. And then he sounds an even more ominous note by pointing out that our wicked foe has an army

of accomplices: “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” (Eph. 6:12). Some commentators go into great detail about the distinctions between these four categories of demons. But the Bible, in fact, does not give us enough information to distinguish these groups from each other.

Paul’s point, in using four designations for demons, seems to be simply to underscore his warning that we face a fearsome enemy. Only a fool would take the devil and company lightly. They are a tremendous force for evil. People who go through their day without a thought for an unseen adversary are perilously naïve.

What is our diabolical enemy up to in our lives? What does he hope to accomplish? Well, if you are a Christ follower, he has already lost the biggest battle—the one to hold your soul captive to sin and death and hell. But that does not mean that he has conceded the overall war. From this point on, his goal is to drive a wedge between you and your Savior. He wants to do as much damage to this relationship as possible and to sabotage your effectiveness in service to Christ.

There are a number of ways in which he can accomplish these purposes. He tempts you into sin (working hand in hand with your flesh and the world), so as to undo the work of God’s Spirit who is persistently conforming you to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:29). He keeps you from spending time in Scripture, which is your source of spiritual nourishment and knowledge of God (Ps. 1:2–3; 2 Tim. 3:15–17). He muzzles your witness, so that others will not hear the good news of Jesus from you. He diverts your time, energy, and resources into temporal pursuits instead of into Christ-focused ministry. Paul doesn’t want us to be naïve about this relentless, diabolical enemy.

Here’s a second thing that Paul doesn’t want us to be unaware of: *our personal weakness*. He opens this passage about spiritual armor by exhorting us to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10). God’s power, in contrast to our weakness, has been a repeated theme throughout this New Testament epistle.

Paul reminds us, again and again, that the Christian life is not difficult—it's impossible! There is no way that we can live it in our own strength. We have got to learn how to tap into God's power.

Consider these previous references to that power: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know . . . his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph. 1:18–19); "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Eph. 3:16); "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). We get the message! But, just in case we've missed it, Paul wraps up this letter with: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Eph. 6:10).

Friends, we mustn't think for a single minute that we can handle a diabolical enemy in our own strength. We will lose every battle if we do not learn how to appropriate the power of God.

Our naïveté in this regard reminds me of a funny story that my friend Eric has told me about his college baseball days. Eric played ball for a small college. There were barely enough guys on the team to cover all the positions. One day their schedule had them matched up against a much bigger school that had invested a good deal of money and manpower in its baseball program. They showed up with three squads of twenty players each. All of them wore beautiful uniforms and cocky smiles. Their winning record was intimidating.

Amazingly, as the game entered the ninth inning, Eric's team was in the lead. One out. Two outs. The next batter hit a pop ball to the third base side. Eric, the third basemen, moved under it. But his catcher also chased down the ball. A fraction of a second after the ball plopped into Eric's mitt, the catcher ran into him like a truckload of bricks. To everyone's astonishment, Eric held on to the third out. Game over.

But the collision had been jolting. So jolting that Eric was later treated for a concussion at the local hospital. So jolting that, when Eric first struggled to his feet, he did something rather foolish. He taunted the opposing team. He was only a few yards from their dug-

out, and all sixty of them had begun screaming profanities at him when he'd come up with the ball. So Eric—in his stupor—decided to take them on. With all the sense knocked out of him, he headed for their bench. With blurred vision, on wobbly legs. “You wanna piece of me?” he called out.

Fortunately, Eric's teammates got to him before the opposing players did. They wrestled him to the ground and then dragged him away. “Those guys saved my life,” Eric concluded his story with a big grin on his face. From the sound of it, they probably did.

Paul doesn't want any of us to be so daft as to think that we can take on the devil—along with rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms—in our own strength. We can't afford to be naïve about our diabolical enemy, or about our own weakness. Or third, about *our coming crisis*.

When Ephesians 6:13 instructs us to put on the full armor of God, it is so we will be able to stand our ground “when the day of evil comes.” What is this “day of evil” that Paul refers to here? Bible scholars tell us that Paul probably did not have in mind some worldwide, cataclysmic, eschatological event. The day of evil that's coming our way will be just an ordinary day when Satan will strike us with extraordinary force. He'll make his temptations extra tempting, his discouragements extra discouraging. He'll catch us when we are most vulnerable.

Satan is getting ready to attack us. Are we getting ready to repel him? Paul mentions his “schemes” (v. 11). He's sneaky. He knows when and where we are most susceptible. What would it take for him to bring you down? A little more alcohol than you're drinking now? A serious health problem? A conflict that goes unresolved in your marriage? A personal achievement that leads to pride?

Your day of evil will come. As a matter of fact, you'd best think in terms of days—plural. Because Satan won't limit his assaults to one twenty-four-hour period. He'll come after you again and again. Don't be naïve to your diabolical enemy, or your own weakness, or your coming crisis.

Don't Be Naked

Remember the children's fable about the emperor with no clothes? Once upon a time there was a very egotistical king who asked his personal tailor to create a new outfit for him. The king wanted to look good for an upcoming royal parade. The tailor was more than a little bit flustered by this request. He knew that he'd better come up with something impressive for the king to wear, or he himself might be wearing a noose around his neck. But day after day his mind drew a blank.

The morning of the big parade, he had nothing to show the king. Nothing. That's when the idea struck him: *Why not show the king nothing—and tell him that it was something?* So he informed the king that he had designed a magnificent suit of invisible clothes. He appealed to the king's vanity, stating that these were the only invisible clothes in the whole realm. And the king, who was a sucker for flattery, bought the story. He eagerly put on his new outfit and strutted down Castle Street at the head of the parade. He assumed that everyone was staring at his latest threads—but they were actually staring at a whole lot more! (He thought he was cool. But they wondered if he was cold.)

What does this fable have to do with Ephesians 6? Maybe you've already guessed. I'd like to make the observation that we often prance through our day spiritually naked while we imagine ourselves to be fully clothed. And that's because we don't take the time to put on the armor, which God intends for us to wear (see vv. 14–17 for a detailed description of that armor).

How do we don this outfit? I gave you instructions for doing so (see ch. 3) when I recommended the use of several patterns that are helpful in launching us into prayer. Borrowing words from the hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," I encouraged you to: "Put on the gospel armor; each piece put on with prayer." At the beginning of every day, deliberately pray on each of the six pieces of armor that Paul mentions.

Let's briefly review those pieces (it would be a good idea to memorize them), and elaborate on what is meant by each. The belt

of truth tops the list. Truth matters a great deal to God. It's one of his divine attributes. Scripture even calls him "the God of truth" (Isa. 65:16). And Jesus, God's Son, identifies himself as "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

God wants our lives to be marked by truthfulness. Conversely, he hates deceit of any kind. Commandment nine on God's list of top ten moral imperatives prohibits lying (Ex. 20:16). When the writer of Proverbs tells us that there are seven things that the Lord absolutely detests, two of them have to do with dishonesty: "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who pours out lies" (Prov. 6:16–19).

Lies come in all shapes and sizes. We can be guilty of dishonesty even if we haven't told a huge whopper. There's the little lie that gets us out of trouble. The exaggeration used to make a point. The flattery we dish out so that others will like us. Those are all lies. Have you ever shown up late for work, announcing: "The traffic was terrible!" Maybe the traffic *was* terrible—but the real reason for your tardiness was the fact that you overslept and didn't get started on time. Your half-truth was a lie.

We don't even have to open our mouths to practice dishonesty. The guy who waits for the rest of the family to go to bed so that he can sneak onto the Internet and view pornography is living a lie. So is the woman who discreetly slips her new clothing purchases into her closet without telling her husband about this latest splurge. So is the high school student who turns in test answers or an essay that isn't entirely his or her work.

When we pray on the belt of truth, we begin by confessing to God every word or act of deceit from the previous twenty-four hours. And then we ask him to make us ruthlessly honest—so that we will speak only what is completely true, and behave in private as the people we appear to be in public.

The breastplate of righteousness is the second piece of armor on Paul's list. Keep in mind that our standard of righteousness is the character of Christ. So praying on the breastplate of righteousness entails asking God to make me more like Jesus (and acknowledging where I'm most obviously falling short). A brief checklist of Christ-like characteristics is that "fruit of the Spirit" inventory in Galatians

5:22–23: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Let me warn you that God may not answer this prayer in the way that you expect him to. I used to think that getting a fresh infusion of Christ’s righteousness in my life was like taking my car in for an oil change. They drain out all the black cruddy stuff and then refill the crankcase from a hose that’s connected to an unlimited supply of Quaker State’s best 10W–40. Then away I go!

In the same way, when my life is lacking in love, let’s say, I just ask God for Christ’s love, and then imagine him inserting his divine hose into my heart and turning on the flow. I expect to walk away from such a prayer with a fresh compassion for everyone I encounter—a desire to give each of them a hug. Instead, the very next person I run into is a demanding wife (this is just a hypothetical illustration), or a disgruntled employee, or a rude salesclerk, or an overly vigilant traffic cop. I feel like slugging, not hugging. What happened to that love-of-Christ infusion?

The fact is: God never seems to answer my prayer for Christ’s righteousness by pouring it into me like the folks at Jiffy Lube pour fresh oil into my car. Instead, his response comes in the form of a challenge. If I pray for Christ’s love, he sends me someone who’s difficult to even like. If I pray for Christ’s faithfulness, he puts me in an impossible situation that makes me want to quit. If I pray for Christ’s patience, he gives me traffic jams, mile-long checkout lines, and the Chicago Cubs.

Don’t get me wrong. It’s still God who must supply me with whatever aspect of Christ’s righteousness I’ve requested. I can’t work it up on my own. But his provision doesn’t seem to alleviate my need to struggle. Paul expressed this same balance in his epistle to the Philippians, saying “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”—immediately after challenging them to “work out your salvation [i.e., growth in righteousness] “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12–13).

God works *in* as we work *out*. He supplies as we struggle. Don’t forget that as you pray on the breastplate of righteousness.

The gospel shoes must be put on next. Paul requires that our feet be “fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). The gospel of peace is the good news that peace with God—forgiveness and reconciliation—has been made possible through Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross (see Rom. 5:1 and Col. 1:20). Once we have prayed on our gospel shoes, we are ready to take this message to others. We are prepared to run into, rather than away from, opportunities to talk about our Savior.

Lon Allison and Mark Anderson, in their book *Going Public with the Gospel*, cite surveys which show that only one Christ follower in twenty actually shares his or her faith with others. “How is this possible?” the authors ask incredulously. “These people are living a life in disobedience to the commands of Jesus. They demonstrate with their self-centered lifestyle that they are not loving their lost neighbors. . . . If anyone knows that his or her friends, coworkers and relatives are lost and on their way to hell but refuses to share with them the truth that could change their eternal destiny, he or she may not be a Christian.”⁵

Those are strong words! If it’s been a very, very long time (if ever) since you have explained to someone how to experience peace with God, do you know what is holding you back? Maybe you have attributed your reluctance to share the good news to a lack of opportunities, boldness, articulateness, or heartfelt desire. But what’s behind these deficiencies? Prayerlessness. You haven’t been praying on the armor of gospel shoes, and so your enemy has been defeating you in this matter.

It’s quite possible that you are so defeated when it comes to introducing others to Christ that you no longer care (or realize) that you are defeated. Sharing the gospel is a nonissue to you. That’s defeated. But, if it’s any consolation to you, even the great apostle Paul—who spread the good news of Jesus Christ all across the first-century world—confessed his need for more courage and initiative to carry out his mission. Paul had to pray on his gospel shoes every day. And he asked his friends to intercede for him along these same lines.

Satan

How does one pray on the gospel shoes? This would be a good time to review the three-open prayer (see ch. 10). We must pray for open doors (opportunities to talk about spiritual matters), open mouths (boldness to interject Christ into these conversations), and open hearts (a responsiveness to what we say).

Now we are ready to pick up the shield of faith, our fourth piece of armor. The faith that Paul is referring to here is not saving faith. It's not the initial faith that we place in Christ when we ask him to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. The faith that Paul has in mind here is an ongoing confidence in God. Satan attempts to undermine this assurance by shooting flaming arrows at us (Eph. 6:16).

What are these flaming arrows that can set us ablaze if we're not protected by our shield of faith? Difficult circumstances. Seemingly unanswered prayers. Unfair criticism. Physical fatigue or illness. Loneliness. Generic discouragement. Relational conflicts. These kinds of things take aim at our faith-inspired optimism. They call into question God's concern for us. Does he really care? Is he paying attention to what's going on in our lives?

We must identify each flaming arrow in order to prayerfully extinguish it with our shield of faith. Once we have put our finger on what's troubling us, we can talk to God about it. We can ask for protection, or wisdom, or perseverance, or joy, or a thicker skin, or healing, or a friend, or whatever it is we need. Of course, what we need most is a confident faith in God.

Sometimes, as I'm praying for a shield of faith, I imagine God handing it to me but my arm being too weak to hold it up. What good is this shield if I don't have the strength to lift it? So I pray for that as well. I ask God to invigorate me so that I can raise my shield to stop Satan's arrows.

Two pieces of armor to go. Let's put on our headgear: the helmet of salvation. "Salvation" is such a broadly inclusive word. When we first prayed, "Dear Jesus, I surrender my life to you as Savior and Lord," God poured out more blessings upon our lives than we could ever comprehend. Our sins were forgiven. We were adopted into God's family. Our eternal destiny was secured in heaven. The Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. We were endowed with spiritual

gifts—supernatural abilities. We gained access to God in prayer. The list goes on and on. All of these blessings fall under the heading, “salvation.”

So, what does it mean to put on the helmet of salvation? Well, what does a helmet protect? A person’s head, right? His or her mind, thoughts, attitudes. When I pray on the helmet of salvation, I am asking God to turn my attention away from what it has been stuck on and to refocus it on my spiritual blessings.

What have I been thinking about? Have I been mentally preoccupied with resentment toward someone who’s offended me, or with a desire for a caramel frappuccino, or with a problem at work, or with my son’s misbehavior, or with my vacation plans, or with my need to get the lawn mowed before it rains?

Not all of these musings are bad. Some are quite necessary. But they are not the thoughts that God wants to dominate my mind. Paul wrote to the Colossians: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, . . . Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:1–2). That’s just another way of saying (as I understand it), “Put on the helmet of salvation.”

And, practically speaking, the way that I do this is by deliberately reciting some of those blessings that are associated with my salvation. I pray (right out loud): “Lord, you’ve forgiven my sins—putting them as far from me as the east is from the west. I am now your son, and there is an eternal inheritance waiting for me in heaven. Your Spirit is living in me as my Counselor, Perfecter, Intercessor, Teacher. You have given me a mission, a purpose for living.” By the time I’m done reviewing my salvation’s benefits package, I have a whole new perspective on life. My helmet is in place, protecting what’s going on in my head.

Paul does not leave us wondering what he means by the sixth and final piece of armor: the sword of the Spirit. He comes right out and tells us that this is *the word of God* (Eph. 6:17). When I initially saw the word *sword*, I immediately imagined the sort of broadsword that would be used by a knight in a King Arthur movie. I pictured it to be long and heavy. A bit difficult to wield, but it could knock

your enemy into the next time zone if you were lucky enough to connect with it.

But, according to historians, the Roman soldier's sword was rather short. And he didn't swing it like Bobby Bonds swings a baseball bat. He controlled it dexterously in close, hand-to-hand combat. The key to this sword's effectiveness was the skill of the soldier who used it.

To arm oneself with the sword of the Spirit is to become skillful in the handling of God's Word. (See 2 Tim. 2:15.) Do you read Scripture daily? I was watching the DVDs of a Christian leadership conference recently—the biggest conference of its type in the country, and one that is broadcast around the world. To my dismay, the host of this conference recommended that his listeners might want to make Bible reading a regular habit. Why would I be dismayed by such great advice? Because he felt it was necessary to say this to a gathering of *leaders*. Shouldn't Bible reading be a given for these folks?

God's Word is the only offensive weapon in a Christ follower's armor. We can't expect to achieve spiritual victories if we aren't capable of using it well. That means reading it daily—following some sort of a systematic schedule. That means memorizing key portions of it. That means keeping a journal in which we write down personal applications for the insights we have gleaned. That means praying as we walk through each step above.

Six pieces of armor. Are we wearing them, or running around naked? Each piece gets put on with prayer.

Don't Be Napping

It doesn't take a Bible scholar to figure out Paul's major emphasis as he closes the passage. Take a pen and circle the words *pray*, *prayers*, and *praying* in Ephesians 18–20.

And PRAY in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of PRAYERS and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always

keep on PRAYING for all the saints. PRAY also for me. . . . PRAY that I may declare it [the gospel] fearlessly, as I should.

Paul mentions prayer five times in three verses. And, if that's not enough to drive home his theme, look at how often he uses the word *all* or *always* in verse 18. Four times! Paul is not only encouraging us to pray, he's exhorting us to do a lot of it. This is the key to overcoming our enemy.

And Satan knows it. Remember, "Satan trembles, when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees"? The devil has no desire to be a beneficiary of our prayers. He will do everything possible to keep us from praying. His best strategy, to our shame, seems to be the inciting of drowsiness whenever he catches us in the mood for prayer. Here's another old adage: "Satan is never too busy to rock the cradle of a sleeping Christian." Our enemy induces napping when we should be praying.

Remember what Jesus was doing just hours before his crucifixion? He took his disciples to one of their favorite outdoor hang-outs: the garden of Gethsemane. He explained to them that they were about to engage in a fierce spiritual conflict. He warned them to pray, or else. Then he moved off for some privacy and started praying himself.

What did the disciples do? Did they pray? No, they napped. Three times Jesus returned to these guys and found them asleep (see Matt. 26:36–46). Each time he warned them that if they didn't start praying they'd be woefully unprepared for what was ahead. He used that line on them that we still use today to rouse ourselves ("the spirit is willing, but the body is weak"), admitting that the best of our intentions are worthless if we don't back them up with actions. But they continued to nap.

Then the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. And the disciples weren't ready. Peter is a prime example of how someone behaves who is not prayed up when everything hits the fan. First, he wildly hacked off a guy's ear with his sword (*not* the sword of the Spirit). Then, he ran for his life. Finally, he disowned his best friend.

All of Peter's buddies also performed like losers. Which brings to mind a favorite saying of my kids: "You snooze, you lose." Now, in our house this means that the last piece of pizza will be gone if you don't grab it right away. But, with respect to the disciples, it meant that napping instead of praying resulted in them being totally defeated. *You snooze, you lose.*

This is serious business. A wiser Peter later wrote that our diabolical enemy "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Prayerlessness is a dangerous condition. If we want to experience spiritual victories we must wake up and start praying. Today! Go back through this book a second and a third time. Study it with a small group. Pick out some things to put into practice.

I recently read an article about Jerry Jenkins, coauthor of the *Left Behind*⁶ series. Jerry has written over 150 books, many of them biographies of famous people. Several years ago, he helped Billy Graham compile his memoirs. During that process, he asked the renowned evangelist, "What's the secret of your success?" Graham gave him two responses: daily Bible study and constant prayer.

Jerry pressed for a further description of this second ingredient. "I know that Scripture says to pray constantly," he countered, "but that's just figurative language. Nobody can actually *do* that." Dr. Graham quietly replied: "I'm doing it right now. I've been praying throughout this conversation."

What has made Billy Graham such a tremendous man of God? Prayer. Why has he been able to redirect the eternal destinies of so many people by introducing them to Christ? Prayer. How has he been able to maintain a life of such moral integrity when other leaders have fallen? Prayer.

Prayer. It's time to stop talking about it and to start doing it.

Onto the Praying Field

1. Do you tend to underestimate or overestimate your spiritual enemy? Explain.

2. In what ways is your flesh most likely to assert itself? What influences of the world (peer pressure, entertainment, boss' expectations, advertising, etc.) are you most susceptible to?
3. How does Satan most effectively undermine you? (Review the chapter for a description of his tactics.) If you were Satan, how would you attack you?
4. Describe your last "day of evil"—a time when all hell seemed to break loose in your life. How could you have been better prepared to face it?
5. Carefully review what this chapter has to say about the six pieces of spiritual armor in Ephesians 6. Now pray that armor on—one piece at a time.
6. As you conclude this book on prayer, how are you doing? Are you praying more often and more effectively?

What have been your three or four best takeaways from this study?

What insights do you still need to put into practice?