

PRAYING
THE
ARMOR
OF
GOD

RICK
STEDMAN



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To our three children,
Micah, Noah, and Jesse,
with the prayer that God would
put on each of you his full armor to
protect you and strengthen you,
“so that when the day of evil comes,
you may be able to stand your ground,
and after you have done everything, to stand.”
(Ephesians 6:13)

Introduction

Do you desire to improve your prayer life? I certainly do. In fact, I've been on a quest to improve my prayer life for years. I've read books, attended seminars, filled journals, listened to countless sermons, and preached over a hundred sermons on prayer. One year I taught fifty-two weeks in a row on prayer, which we called: "2001, A Prayer Odyssey." In three decades of ministry, it was the only sermon series that people requested I repeat the following year. I even chose to focus my doctorate of ministry on prayer, primarily in order to deepen my devotional life.

But the most meaningful, practical, and easy-to-remember method of prayer for me has been praying the armor of God.

In this book, I share my journey with you. Part 1 explains *why* we should pray the armor of God, including what the different pieces of the armor signify. Part 2 is a guidebook for daily prayer, illustrating *how* we can pray the armor of God.

How is this book different from other books on prayer? It's this: the pieces of the armor of God are arranged to correspond to the seven days of the week. Since you already know the days of the week, you can easily remember how to pray the armor of God. For instance: **S**undays we **S**trap on the Belt of Truth, **T**uesdays we **T**read in the Shoes of Peace, **F**ridays we **F**ight with the Sword of the Spirit, and so on.

In the beginning, you may want to pray the Part 2 prayers verbatim. Just pick a day of the week or a weekly topic, and pray one of the suggested prayers for those you love. If you pray one page per day, corresponding to each day of the week, you will finish in about ten weeks. Then you can start over and do it again...and again.

After a while, you will naturally memorize the essential elements, and the prayers will take on your own voice. You may be driving in a car, taking a walk, or lying in bed and feel drawn to prayer. You will think: *Well, today is Sunday, so I'll strap the belt of truth on those I love.* You begin to ask God to reveal his truth in your life, to fill your spouse with his truth, and for your kids to love truth and desire to be people of honesty. You may pray for your friends to be led by truth, your church to be a beacon of truth, your nation to return to truth, and the whole world to discover God's truth. It's a great way to pray! Plus,

- Parents and grandparents can help their kids—even prodigals—through prayer.
- Spouses can pray for one another and for growth in their marriage in key areas.
- Singles can pray for friends—or for their future spouses and families.
- Women can pray these essential qualities into the lives of those they love.
- Men may finally find, in this method, an enjoyable way to pray. Armor, after all, is something most men can relate to. It's masculine. It's military. It's tough. Whereas men sometimes feel pressured in churches to act in touchy-feely ways, this allows men to draw close to God in a way that doesn't compromise manhood.

As we begin, here is my prayer for you:

I pray, almighty Father, that as we pray the armor of God, you would clothe us with Jesus Christ himself, transform us into his image, comfort us by your Spirit, and protect us from the evil one. I pray that the readers of this book would be filled with your truth, cleansed by your righteousness, calmed by your peace, fortified by your faith, eternally protected by your salvation, instructed by your Word, and empowered to rest in prayer. In Jesus' name, amen.

PART ONE

How to Pray the Armor of God

Why Pray the Armor of God?

*“If we follow Jesus and look only to His righteousness,
we are in His hands and under the protection of
Him and His Father. And if we are in communion
with the Father, nought can harm us.”*

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER¹

A few years ago I was driving my fourteen-year-old son home from school. Like every other parent on the planet, I asked, “How was school today?”

He casually replied, “School was okay—except my TA in English was stoned.”

A surge of angry thoughts raced through my mind. First, I was mad at myself. I felt like a failure as a parent for allowing my son to attend a drug-infested high school. Plus, I was upset with our public education system. My child was exposed to someone—the teacher’s assistant, no less—who was smoking pot. Should we yank him out of school? Should I talk to the teacher? The principal? The governor? The president? (Okay, I admit that my emotions were getting carried away a bit.)

Instead, I asked, “Is this the first time that’s happened?”

“No, he’s a real stoner, and he smokes pot every day.”

This made me even more upset. My kid had been exposed to this before, and I was totally clueless. I asked, “Do other kids do drugs?”

“Of course.”

“How about you?” I said, trying to seem calm. “Have you ever tried drugs or wanted to try them?”

“No way. Doing drugs is dumb. Those kids are idiots.”

At that moment, I was both elated and scared. I was elated my son was standing strong against temptations and that he and I were having this conversation. During the rest of the drive home, we talked about drugs, temptation, and peer pressure. So on the one hand, it was a fantastic day for me as a dad.

But on the other hand, I was scared. How could I, as a father, protect my son in a public school environment? I couldn't be physically present with him. I couldn't get rid of all temptations. So what could I do? What would help my kids be safe in a world of moral and spiritual danger?

I'm sure that most parents share this concern. How can we protect our children against the onslaught of “a warped and crooked generation” (Philippians 2:15)? How can we defend ourselves and those we love against the “flaming arrows” of the enemy (Ephesians 6:16)?

These questions don't apply only to parents. How can married couples protect themselves from the temptations that bombard them? How can grandparents, neighbors, singles, or classmates protect their families and friends from the enemy who seeks to “kill and destroy” (John 10:10)? After all, our human defenses are no match for this enemy. Fortunately, the apostle Paul answers this question in Ephesians 6:11: “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

But just *how* does one put on the full armor of God? Paul says to do it but doesn't mention how. As a young Christian, I assumed this was something I had to do. So, for many years I tried to put this armor on myself. I tried to be truthful, peaceful, righteous, and so on. I'm sure you can guess the result. In spite of my sincere efforts, I failed repeatedly.

Then it hit me that since this is the armor of God, it probably was not something I could put on myself. I would need God to put it on and in me. So, rather than *trying* to be peaceful, I asked God to *clothe* and *fill* me with his peace.

In other words, I began to *pray* the armor of God.

How to Put on the Armor

Paul ends the armor of God section of his letter to the Ephesians with this: “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 Lord's people" (6:18). In other words, he essentially says, "Keep praying about it."

This was a thrilling insight for me, and I began to pray the armor of God with gusto. At first, I prayed through the whole armor of God every day for myself, for my family members (one at a time), for my friends, for my church, and for the world. But this was overwhelming, and the topics were too important to cover quickly. So I focused on one piece of armor per day. I found this to be more manageable and enjoyable.

But there was a problem: I would sometimes forget which piece of armor I prayed for on the previous day, so I would start the list again from the beginning. Over time, I saw that I was praying more often for the belt of truth than the helmet of salvation or the sword of the Spirit. Then one day I noticed there were six pieces to the armor of God, plus the instruction to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (6:18). I realized that these seven topics would pair nicely with the seven days of the week, and I developed a simple memory device to help me (and our church members) remember which piece of armor to pray each day. Since you have already memorized the days of the week, you can easily memorize and utilize the armor of God in prayer.

Sunday: Strap on the Belt of Truth

Monday: Make Fast the Breastplate of Righteousness

Tuesday: Tread in the Shoes of Peace

Wednesday: Wield the Shield of Faith

Thursday: Think Within the Helmet of Salvation

Friday: Fight with the Sword of the Spirit

Saturday: Steadfastly Pray in the Spirit

I can be driving, sitting at my desk, or out walking and feel the need to pray. My first thought is, *Okay, what day of the week is it? Well, it's Wednesday, so I need to wield the shield of faith.* I pray for God to increase my faith, I pray for God to fill my wife with faith, and I pray for my kids to always be people of faith. I pray for my friends to be strengthened in their faith, for our church to be a place where we fight, side by side, the good fight

of faith. I pray for our nation to return to the faith it was founded upon, and I pray for people throughout the world to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened to the saving faith found in Jesus.

Or if it's Thursday, I pray, *God, please help me think within the helmet of salvation*. I continue on this course every day of the week and thereby pray the armor of God in a systematic and enjoyable way.

If you'd like to learn to pray the armor of God, I encourage you to begin right now. Don't read the whole book before you pray. Instead, pray as you go. Make this a prayer journey. As you read, take time to pause and pray from time to time, especially over the Scriptures. So let's begin: take a moment, focus your thoughts, and pray this prayer aloud now:

Lord,

I want to put on your full armor through prayer, and I want
my loved ones to be protected from evil.

Teach me, through your Word, how to pray on the armor of
God for myself and for those I love.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Living in a Battle Zone

Before we learn to pray each piece of armor, we might first ask, "Why do we need armor, anyway?" The answer is: we are in the midst of a dangerous spiritual battlefield, with demonic arrows flying at us. Without the right armor, we surely will be wounded.

Christians often forget this. A woman in our church once called me, quite distraught. She and her husband were committed Christians and had raised their children to love the Lord and be involved in church. She was shocked and mortified to discover that her teenage daughter was experimenting with sex. "How could this happen?" she exclaimed. "She knows we think this is terribly wrong."

A part of my response to her was, "You have an enemy who is trying to destroy your family. If he can attack one of your kids, he will. You and your family are in a battle zone, and a fiery dart from the enemy has hit your daughter."

“But I thought Christians were protected from Satan’s attacks!” she said. “I never thought this could happen to us. What do I do now?”

Every pastor has received calls like this. The evidence is compelling: We are living on the battlefield. Spiritual warfare is very real. We have an enemy that is out to destroy us. “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). According to the Bible, this war has been going on since the creation of the world.

In Ephesians 6:10-12, the apostle Paul describes the reality of this daily conflict:

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.

On a philosophical level, this helps answer some of life’s hardest questions. Have you ever wondered why life is so difficult? Why bad things happen to good people, or why life seems to be such a series of struggles? Why committed Christians have a hard time staying married and why churches go through acrimonious splits? Why, in spite of all our cultural and technological advances, we still can’t achieve world peace? The reality of spiritual warfare provides an answer: life is difficult because we have an incredibly malicious, highly organized, persistent, and darkly devious enemy who is out to destroy us.

Let me say this bluntly: every day, your evil foe sets his sights to destroy your marriage, your kids, your friends, your church. . . everyone and everything you care about. What are you doing to protect them? Try beginning with this prayer,

Lord,

I want my loved ones to be protected with the full armor of God.

But Lord, we have enemies who don’t want this to happen.

They want us to remain vulnerable and unprotected.

Now that I realize this, I pray even more urgently and fervently, please put your armor on those I love.
In Jesus' name, amen.

Fasten Your Seat Belts

How can we protect those we love from the evil one and his nefarious forces? The answer is just common sense: we need to put on spiritual armor when we start our days, much like we fasten our seat belts when we get into our cars. Just as we can strap our kids into their car seats physically, we can pray the armor of God on them spiritually.

When I was a kid, cars didn't have seat belts, we didn't use sunscreen, and no one wore bike helmets. Our parents taught us to look both ways before playing in the street. Parents today are so maniacal about safety that kids aren't even allowed in the street. Today's kids have seat belts fastened, bicycle helmets on, and antiseptic hand gel in lunch bags. (The emphasis on safety sometimes is funny. One father took his family on a vacation drive, and happened to pass a nudist colony. As he sped past, his young son noticed some cyclists and said, "Dad—did you notice? They weren't wearing...any helmets!")

Safety preparedness is a good thing, and parents are wise to protect their kids physically. My plea is for parents to do the same thing spiritually. Unfortunately, many seem to be unaware they are in the middle of a spiritual war zone. They don't realize that as their kids go off to school, the evil one has his sights on them and has a plan that very day to harm them. They need protection. Spiritually, life is no picnic—it's a battle.

Once we grasp this, the sensible question is: how can we protect ourselves and our loved ones against this enemy? Fortunately, after Paul explains the reality of our battle with evil, he tells us what to do:

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. 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.

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 Lord's people (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Before we move ahead, let's pause again for a moment of prayer. Pray the following prayer aloud to your loving Lord.

Lord,

This is beginning to make sense to me. I understand the need to fasten seat belts, and I'm very careful to protect my family physically.

Now I realize my family also needs protection spiritually, so teach me how to be diligent to pray your armor on those I love.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Are We Strong Enough to Fight This Enemy?

Paul repeats himself in Ephesians 6:10-13, saying twice: "Put on the full armor *of God*." His repetition is intentional: it drives home the fact that we are not strong enough to fight against this vicious foe alone. If we try to fight with our own strength and protect ourselves with human armor, we will fail miserably. But that's exactly what most of us are doing. This is why Paul emphasizes that we must fight in the strength and power of the Lord, and we must be equipped with his armaments and not merely our own.

Indeed, confession is good for the soul, so let's confess to the Lord our need to rely on him and not our own strength:

Lord,

I am not strong enough to fight the evil one. If I try to fight him with my own strength, I will fail miserably.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Pray it again...and then a third time!

This is why it is so crucial that we learn to *pray* the armor of God. To be honest, it has taken me many years—and repeated failure—to learn this. In the past I was taught to logically analyze each piece of armor. Then, I was encouraged to *try really hard to be those things*.

For instance, I was taught the biblical understanding of truth, and I was then directed to *try* to live that way. The image of the belt of truth as the armor *of God* melted away, and I was instructed to *try* to speak truthfully, to *try* to act truthfully, and to *try* to live truthfully. I was supposed to *try* to hang out with truthful friends, and *try* to challenge dishonest people to realize the error of their ways. In short, I was unwittingly *trying to create a piece of armor for myself*. It was my job to be truthful, which is to say that the armor would be as strong as I was able to make it.

But that was precisely the problem. I'm not strong enough to make my own armor, and neither are you. None of us can fight successfully on our own power. Remember, Paul said we are to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Truthfully, I can't trust myself to be completely truthful—even with myself. So a belt of my own design and making isn't going to be sufficient. I don't need my belt of truth around me; I need *the Lord's* belt of truth. It's an admirable and important goal to try to be truthful, but God's belt is infinitely stronger.

Let's try that prayer of confession again, with an added request:

Lord,

I am not strong enough to fight the evil one. If I try to fight him with my own strength, I will fail miserably.

And if I try to arm myself against him, I will also fail completely.

Give me the wisdom to rely only on your armor, Lord.

In Jesus' name, amen.

It's natural, at this point, to wonder whom we should pray for first: ourselves or our loved ones? Personally, I like the advice given by airlines. During the preflight safety speech, passengers are counseled that in the event of an emergency, they are to secure their own oxygen masks before they try to affix their children's. In the same way, it makes sense to pray the armor of God onto ourselves first, to get ourselves spiritually right before God. Then we are better able to pray for those we love.

This will be an important part of our prayer journey in this book. First, we can pray each prayer for ourselves, and then pray it for those we love, one at a time, by inserting their names. Let's give it a try. Pray again the same prayer, this time for someone who is dear to you:

Lord,

_____ is not strong enough to fight the evil one.

If _____ tries to fight him with his/her own strength, _____ will fail miserably.

And if _____ tries to arm himself/herself against him, _____ will also fail completely.

Give _____ the wisdom to rely only on your armor, Lord.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Now pray this again for someone else you love, and another, and another. In time, you will learn not only to adapt the prayers of this book for those you love, but you will also learn how to pray Scripture personally and powerfully.

How Does the Armor of God Work?

As we learn to pray the armor of God, notice that Paul twice said to put on the *full* armor of God. Some Christians naively believe (maybe unconsciously) that they are protected from evil because they have been saved. "Oh, I'm saved, so I don't need anything else." They indeed may have on the helmet of salvation, but they still are vulnerable to attack. Other Christians may feel that because they are persons of peace (they have on the shoes of peace) they are protected. But they leave the rest of their body and soul open to attack. If we want to protect our loved ones and ourselves,

we need to pray on the *full* armor of God because God's armor works best when all the pieces are in place, not just a few.

Before I learned how to pray the armor of God, I prayed diligently for those I love, but I emphasized some aspects of the Christian life over others. The sevenfold method of praying the armor of God solved this problem. Praying the armor of God has taught me to pray in a balanced, comprehensive way since I desire my loved ones to be fully armed.

Praying the armor of God also taught me to *not* focus on evil. I was shocked to discover that, in Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul's instructions on how to defend ourselves against evil have *very little to do with evil*. In my opinion, this is where some books on spiritual warfare go astray from the biblical text. They try to fight against evil by concentrating on the different schemes and ploys of the enemy. Instead, the biblical way to engage in warfare and fight the darkness is not to concentrate on the darkness. We fight the enemy by focusing on the Lord.

For instance, in Ephesians 6:10, Paul doesn't say to be strong in deliverance tactics, in exorcism prayers, or in our understanding of evil. Instead, he writes, "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." The way we defeat evil and darkness is by focusing on Jesus. After all, what is the armor of God except the very qualities of Jesus himself? He is Truth, Righteousness, Peace, the Word, and so on. As followers of Christ, we fight best by clothing ourselves with the very character and person of Christ, and then by allowing the light of Jesus to shine in and through us. In fact, to the Christians in Rome, Paul specifically connects these themes of armor, light, and being clothed with Christ: "So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. . . clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:12,14).

Of course, this is just common sense in the natural world. How do we get rid of the darkness when we go into a dark room late at night? Do we look at the darkness, study the darkness, and speak against the darkness? Do we yell in a loud voice, "Darkness, be gone!" or strongly say, "Darkness, I rebuke you"? Of course not. *We turn on the light*. It's the same in the supernatural realm. To get rid of the darkness of evil, we turn on the light of Christ. We bring Jesus into the situation, which is to ask him to fill us and, by his very presence, shine the light of glory. Light always conquers darkness. Light always prevails. Focus on Jesus rather than the evil one; it works better and it's safer for your soul.

With this in mind, let's take a moment to pause and pray. Let's combine the prayers we've learned so far into a complete, heartfelt prayer to God, and let's finish by praying a few words from Ephesians 6:10:

Lord,

I'm not strong enough to fight the evil one. If I try to fight him with my own strength, I will fail completely. And if I try to arm myself against him, I will fail miserably. Instead, I ask you to strengthen me, Lord, with your mighty power.

I understand the need for physical protection; now I realize my need for spiritual protection.

I ask you to put on me the very character of Christ, because it's light that overcomes the darkness.

I ask you to put on me your full armor, O God, so I can take my stand against the devil's schemes.

In Jesus' name, amen.

I suggest that you use this simple prayer, or something like it, to begin your daily time of "praying the armor of God." I like to pray some form of this introductory prayer for myself before I pray on the specific piece of armor for that day. Next, I usually pray some variation of this prayer for my wife, by name:

Lord,

My wife, Amy, is also not strong enough to fight the evil one. If she tries to fight him with her own strength, she will fail completely.

And if she tries to arm herself against him, she will fail miserably.

Instead, I ask you to strengthen her, Lord, with your mighty power.

As she understands the need for physical protection, help her grasp her need for spiritual protection.

I ask you to put on her the very character of Christ because it's light that overcomes the darkness.

I ask you to put on her your full armor, O God, so that she
can take her stand against the devil's schemes.
In Jesus' name, amen.

I suggest you give this a try right now. Pray the preceding prayer aloud, but substitute the name and pronouns of a person of significance in your life. For instance, begin the prayer with, "Lord, I pray for my boyfriend, Alex..." or "Lord, I pray for my neighbor, Karen..."

After this introductory prayer, I pray the specific armor of the day for my wife. Next, I pray the same for my three children, one by one. At this point the routine changes, and I may pray for my parents, my siblings, extended family, or close family friends. Or I may feel led to pray for a coworker, our church body, our community, our government, our nation, or even our world. If we just pray for a few people each day, in a few months, we can cover a lot of ground. Once you get the hang of it, the prayers flow smoothly and naturally. (The second half of this book will guide you through this process.) After praying the armor of God for myself and a few others, I finish my prayer time with other specific requests (such as prayers for those who are ill, in need, and so on). It's a great way to start the day.

How to Protect Those You Love

On the day my son told me that a teacher's assistant at his high school was stoned, I knew that a great way to protect him was to keep the lines of conversation open, to continue talking and encouraging him. I also knew that I needed to monitor his friendships and keep an eye out for any slip-page. But as I drove home, I found myself praying silently for him, even as we continued to talk and drive. I prayed a silent prayer of thanks—and then several intense prayers of protection:

Lord,

Please protect my son from evil forces.

Please continue to keep his heart turned toward you.

Please help him withstand the many temptations at his high school, and keep him pure and clear and sober-minded.

Give him wisdom beyond his years and help him be a light to these kids who need you and your love so desperately. In Jesus' name, amen.

Then, naturally and easily, I prayed the armor of God upon him.

After years of praying in this manner, I can testify that it doesn't get boring or old. Now that my kids are grown and gone, I still enjoy walking through their rooms (often as I am brushing my teeth in the morning and evening) and praying the armor of God for them. When I'm done praying, I feel great. I can't really explain it, but I know:

- I've spent quality time with the Lord.
- I've prayed in a biblical, effective, and simple manner.
- I've been armed and empowered to face that day's battles.
- I've asked God to arm and protect those I love from spiritual warfare.
- I'm ready to look to God, this very day, to answer these prayers.

Here's the Plan as We Proceed

In the remainder of Part 1, we will look at the seven pieces of the armor of God and how each fits with its day of the week. Before we begin praying the armor of God daily, it's helpful to understand how each piece of armor protected an ancient warrior, and how each corresponds to the character qualities of Christ. Why did Paul liken truth to a belt and peace to shoes? In addition, how might these relate to the different days of the week?

In Part 2, the daily prayer process will begin. We will pray every day for ten weeks, each day writing down the date and the person(s) prayed for. We will learn that each week has a different topic, which will give our prayer experience breadth. And most importantly, we will discover that all the prayers are full of Scripture, which will give us depth.

With that in mind, let's begin by learning why it is appropriate, on Sundays, to ask God to "strap on us the belt of truth."

SUNDAY

Strap on the Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor God directs us to put on is the belt of truth: “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist” (Ephesians 6:14).

Why a Belt?

We probably wouldn't have guessed that the very first item to guard us is a simple belt. After all, we're already on the battlefield and spiritual darts are being shot at us—now. Perhaps we would pick up a shield first, or put a breastplate over our hearts or a helmet to cover our heads. How could a skinny piece of rope or leather protect us?

Historically, for both Greek and Roman soldiers, their full armor was called *panoply* (which literally meant “a full suit of armor”). Wilbur Fields provides a good summary of the *panoply* in his commentary on the book of Ephesians:

The historian Polybius (about 200 B.C.) wrote a description of Roman armor in his time. Polybius said that the Roman panoply consisted, in the first place, of a shield (*thureos*), and that along with the shield was a sword (*machaira*). Then next came two javelins (*hussoi*), a helmet (*perikephalaia*) and a greave (*knemis*). The majority, when they had further put on a bronze plate, measuring a span

every way, which they wore on their breasts, and called a heart guard (*kardiophulax*), were completely armed. But those citizens who were assessed at more than 10,000 drachmae wore instead, together with the other arms, *cuirasses* made of chain mail.²

Paul's first item, the belt, was not even mentioned in Polybius's list of armor. Technically, a belt was not a piece of armor, but simply an essential piece of clothing for both soldiers and everyday citizens. It was not like the belts worn by police officers today, full of devices and holders for various weapons. It was not like, in comic book fashion, the famous "bat belt" from which Batman always had at his fingertips any crime-stopping or life-saving device needed. The belt of truth Paul is talking about isn't a military belt, an ammo holster, or a superhero belt.

Instead, Paul is referring to the simple strap—for the poor, probably just a piece of rope—that nearly all adults wore. In biblical times, most people wore simple tunics. A tunic was a single, rectangular piece of cloth, folded and sometimes roughly sewn on two sides, with holes cut for one's head and arms. Tunics would fall naturally along one's torso and down to the lower legs or ankles. Because tunics were not fitted, they would be cumbersome to walk or work in, and especially difficult to fight in. For this reason, a belt was strapped around one's waist to keep the flowing garment out of the way.

If a person were to run or fight, the lower portion of the tunic would be raised up and tucked under the belt, a process called "girding the loins." In fact, the word *gird* means "to encircle or bind something with a flexible band." This is just what the belt did for the tunic. It encircled and bound the loose and flowing parts of the tunic to the soldier's body so he could fight less encumbered, and it did the same for the civilian so he or she could work.

The image of utilizing a belt is found throughout the Bible. God instructed Moses how to eat the Passover meal when leaving Egypt: "This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11). They were to eat in readiness to flee, symbolized

by, as the older translations translated it, their “girded loins.” In the same way, we believers are instructed by Jesus to be ready for his return by being “dressed ready for service” (Luke 12:35), which reads in some versions, “let your loins be girded about.” Peter also uses the same expression concerning the believer’s mental readiness (1 Peter 1:13).

In all of these cases, the point of girding a belt around one’s waist is to prepare and ready oneself. To have “the belt . . . buckled about your waist” (Ephesians 6:14) simply means: *get ready for action*. So, to pray on the belt of truth signifies we understand a struggle is just ahead of us, and we are preparing ourselves for the fight.

Why Truth?

Truth is necessary because we humans are habitual liars. We even lie to ourselves. Why is this? Jesus said, to the leaders of his day,

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! (John 8:44-45).

According to Jesus, our enemy, the devil, is “a liar,” “the father of lies,” and “there is no truth in him.” While studies reveal that two-thirds of spouses lie to each other, and while over 90 percent of Americans lie routinely,³ Satan lies *100 percent* of the time. There is *no* truth in him.

This is why it’s so important to put on the belt of truth. Satan attacks and attaches himself to us when we deceive. When we lie, we “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27). For me, this has been a revolutionary insight. In the past I thought a white lie was just a little sin. I came to realize, as a result of praying the armor of God, that lying is no minor matter. There is no such thing as a white lie; a lie is a lie. A small foothold is still a foothold—in fact, a foothold is small by definition.

Fortunately, into our world of deep and deceptive darkness, Jesus came to shine the light. The bad news is that Satan lies 100 percent of the time;

the good news is that Jesus is 100 percent truthful. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). When we put on the belt of truth, his light, love, and truthfulness shine in us.

So why is the first item of armor *the belt of truth*? Why aren't we told to put on the belt of peace or the belt of salvation? The answer is this: truth is God's view of reality, which enables us to correctly add the additional pieces of armor. Without truth, how can we be sure that the breastplate of righteousness is really God's concept of righteousness and not some mistaken version of righteousness foisted on us by our culture? Without truth, how can we be sure any piece of armor is truly God's version: His view of peace? His understanding of faith? His definition of salvation? Yes, before we can put on any other piece of armor, with full assurance, we first must solidly pray on God's truth. In this deceptive world, only then can each ensuing piece of armor be correct.

I love Sundays, partly because I love praying truth into the lives of those I love. I pray we would cherish honesty, be repelled by dishonesty, and be able to discern the truth of a matter. I pray that Jesus himself, the Truth, would inhabit and reveal to us any self-deception and so fill us that there would be no room for darkness or satanic footholds.

Give it a try: pray aloud the following prayer, and start your week by prayerfully strapping on the belt of truth.

Lord,

It's Sunday, so it's a great opportunity to strap on the belt of truth.

I pray for you to increase my understanding of your truth.

Please fill my wife/husband (if single, insert the name of a close friend) with truth in her/his inner being.

I pray for my kids (relatives) to always be people of honesty.

I pray for my friends to be strengthened in the truth.

I pray for our church to be a beacon of truth, for in this world, side by side, we fight the good fight of truth.

I pray for our nation to return to your truths, upon which it was founded, and

I pray for people throughout the world to have the eyes of

their heart enlightened to the saving truth found only in
Jesus.

I pray this in his name who is Faithful and True. Amen.

Proverbs 23:23; Psalm 51:6; Proverbs 12:17; Psalm 119:28;
Matthew 5:14-15; Colossians 2:1; Ephesians 1:18; Acts 4:12;
Revelation 19:11.