

Weapons and Warfare

Introduction

Life is full of daily battles: battles in marriage, battles at work, battles in parenting, internal battles with yourself. As I am writing this, I am thinking of three conversations that I had today with people who are going through real-life battles. One guy in his fifties just learned that he has cancer and has been given only months to live. Another conversation involved a mom whose child wants nothing to do with her, and my lunch conversation involved encouraging a great husband and dad who recently lost his job. In all three situations, real people were fighting to move forward.

This workbook is a tool to help you prepare as a believer for the warfare at hand. The war that you find yourself in is a war between light and darkness, good and evil, Jesus and Satan. The warfare that I am talking about is spiritual in nature but very much real. Thankfully, our King, Jesus, gives us weapons to fight the battles we face daily. This workbook's goal is to help you as a believer learn how to use those weapons.

In order to truly get the most out of this workbook, you need to be in a group. After each section, there are Group Questions (GQs). The GQs and the time you spend with your group have the possibility to truly change your life. We grow strong spiritually as we spend time with God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's people. I challenge you to make every effort to connect yourself to a group and to walk with others through this study.

The study was written by Pastor Brian Bagley (Granbury Campus Pastor), Pastor Joey White (Church Planting Pastor and Co-Founder of StoneWater Church), and myself (Jeremy White, Lead Pastor of StoneWater Church). Each of us contributed two sections apiece. The workbook contains six sections and eighteen chapters. It is designed for you to complete one section per week which translates to only three chapters.

The workbook has a progression to it. It starts by describing the war and the enemy (ies), then moves to look at angels and demons, followed by the Armor of God, the Weapon of Prayer, and concludes with bonus weapons. What I like about the progression is that the material gets more practical the further you go. So, stick with it! Show up to your group and be ready to share. I believe that this study is going to grow us as a church in more ways than one.

Group Questions (GQs): First Group Meeting

If your group has not had time to finish section one, then I want to encourage you to start by having someone read the introduction aloud and then answer the following questions as a group

1. Have everyone introduce themselves by sharing: their name, where they grew up, and favorite dessert (you may consider having desserts next week at group).
2. Have someone read the introduction aloud.
3. Have everyone answer the question: What is the biggest battle that you have faced in life thus far?
4. And the question: What is a battle (large or small) that you are facing right now?
5. Describe a time that God showed up in the past as you were fighting a battle.
6. Ask everyone: What are you hoping to get out of this group? Why did you join a group?
7. And also ask: What is the best way for this group to encourage you to stay connected to the group and engaged in reading?
8. End by having the group leaders pray over the group.

Section I: The War

Written by: Jeremy White, Lead Pastor of StoneWater Church

Chapter 1: We are at War

Big Idea: We are in a spiritual war that has physical and eternal consequences.

The Bible describes the Christian life as a war with Christians fighting as soldiers for King Jesus. Sure, the Bible uses other word pictures and images to describe different aspects of our faith, but one that we cannot deny is that we are at war.

Look at some of the descriptions of followers of Jesus from the New Testament.

Images of the Christian Life:

- 1. Children of God: (Ephesians 2:19)** illustrating the fact that we are members of God's household.
- 2. Disciple: (Luke 14:26-33)** stressing our commitment to obey and follow Jesus.
- 3. Christian: (Acts 11:26)** meaning little Christs, which points to our imitation of Jesus.
- 4. Sheep: (Acts 20:28-29)** expressing our vulnerability and need for Jesus' leadership.
- 5. People of God: (Titus 2:11-14)** pointing to what an honor it is to be chosen as his special people.
- 6. The Church: (1 Corinthians 10:32-33)** calling us to be a gathering of people different from the world.
- 7. Members of the Body of Jesus: (1 Corinthians 12:27)** painting the picture of our connectedness to each other.
- 8. Saints: (1 Corinthians 1:2)** referencing that we are set apart as holy and righteous in God's sight.
- 9. Aliens: (1 Peter 2:11)** reminding us that our home is in heaven, not earth.
- 10. Priest: (1 Peter 2:9)** giving us confidence to know that we have the ability to go directly to God the Father through Jesus the Son and our High Priest.
- 11. Soldier: (2 Timothy 2:3-4)** describing the fact that we are involved in a spiritual war.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

This verse describes us as soldiers engaged in a war. As Christians, we are enlisted into the battle by Jesus the day he calls our name to follow him.

You may be thinking, "War, soldier? I thought I was signing up to go to heaven after a good life here on earth."

We have been raised in a scientific age, our perspective in life lends itself to see all our problems in a 4-dimensional world. We see life in 4 dimensions: length, width, height, and time. What if I were to tell you that there is a 5th dimension? It is a spiritual dimension, and even though it's spiritual and often unseen, it affects the physical world.

For instance, if we have financial problems, we attempt to solve the problem by working harder, getting a better job, or cutting our bills. That is 4th dimensional problem solving, and that's the way almost everyone in this world solves problems. If we take a 5th dimensional (spiritual) approach to solving financial problems, we look at the problem knowing that there is a spiritual adversary who is a thief who wants to steal, kill, and destroy every part of our lives (John 10:10). Therefore, we may begin to solve the problem first with prayers by asking God, who is our provider, for wisdom and provision.

Here's another example that is a little more personal. If we have conflict in our marriage, 4th dimensional problem solving looks like going to counseling with a psychologist and relying on secular wisdom to fix our marriage problems. (*If you are a psychologist, I'm glad you are here.*) A spiritual or 5th dimensional approach, is instead open to the reality that your marriage may be under attack spiritually by an enemy who hates the glory that marriage brings to God.

If we are open to recognizing there is a spiritual war taking place in the 5th dimension, then it creates in us a desire to learn more about the war, our weapons, and how to fight.

The war that we are in is a spiritual war. A 5th dimensional battle that affects the other 4 dimensions—our physical world. This war affects your mood for the day, your relationship with your spouse, your work, your habits, your thoughts, your pleasures, your joy, your quality of life now, and whether you will experience heaven or hell in eternity. This war is a battle for your life and soul, and it has eternal consequences.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Describe a time in your life when you recognized that there is more to this world than what we see in 4 dimensions?
2. Does it excite you or scare you to think that as Christians we are caught in a spiritual war? Why?
3. What's one problem that you have in your life currently that may actually be a result of being in a spiritual war?

Chapter 2. History of War

Big Idea: We are in a spiritual war that has physical and eternal consequences.

I love history, especially war history. Give me a pillow, a nice sofa, a Dr. Pepper, popcorn, a WWII documentary, and I'm as happy as an Aggie with a date at Midnight Yell.

Part of fighting our battles in the present and future requires us to know the history of this spiritual war. Let's learn some war history from the Bible.

The war began even before the world began.

Stage 1 - Before the world began...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit existed.

The Bible says the Father loved the Son.

John 17:24 (NLT)

²⁴ Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

Before the world began there was communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There was also love and honor given to the Son (John 17:5).

Stage 2 - God (Father, Son, Spirit) created everything in the heavens (including the spiritual dimension) and the earth.

Genesis 1:1 (NLT)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Creation includes man and woman. God created man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden to work it and rule the earth as vice-regents under Him. As long as man obeyed God, life would be great between him and God, between him and woman, between him and creation. This was paradise.

In the book of Colossians, Paul accounts for God creating the unseen world.

Colossians 1:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

According to the Bible, these angelic beings were: spirits, immortal, holy, excelled in knowledge, powerful, innumerable, created to praise God, to execute his commandments, yet they also had a free will to either follow God or rebel.

Stage 3 - A rebellion took place in heaven and a great angel turned evil (Lucifer/Satan/devil).

Revelation 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Basically, a beautiful and powerful angel (Lucifer) who was high ranking in authority and close in proximity to the throne of God became proud. His pride corrupted his wisdom. He became determined to be like God and to

take God's rule from him. He led a rebellion and managed to lure about a third of the angels to follow him. He underestimated God's power, lost the rebellion, and as a result, he was cast down to the earth.

For more on this rebellion, dig into Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-17.

Satan now rules and leads a kingdom of fallen angels, also known as evil spirits or demons. This was the beginning of the Kingdom of Darkness. Satan's overall strategy is to thwart the plans of God. In the next stage, we see Satan gaining more power and control in this world.

Stage 4 - In the Garden of Eden, Mankind fell into sin and into the Kingdom of Darkness.

Genesis 3 records the original sin. This is known as the Fall of Mankind. It plays out like a strategic battle. The serpent's (Satan's) battle plan was to lie and deceive the woman, Eve. Eve had her guard down as the serpent cleverly carried out his plan by enticing her into desiring the forbidden fruit. As Eve was lured into following her temptations, she convinced her husband to disobey God and eat of the tree. This was a win for Satan and his Kingdom, and it was a loss for all mankind, one that would have serious consequences.

The Consequences of the Fall include:

- Sin and death were passed to all mankind.
- Loss of communion and relationship with God.
- Creation was cursed.
- Conflict between husband and wife.
- Judgment and eternal separation from God in what is referred to as Hell.

Genesis 3 describes how we find ourselves living in a broken world. The brokenness that Mankind experienced revealed that there were and are real life consequences associated with the spiritual war.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What feelings arise in you when you think about the Fall of Mankind in Genesis 3?
2. How much have you thought about or been taught about Satan?
3. What brokenness do you see in this world? What are three areas of your life that you see brokenness?

Section I: The War

Written by: Jeremy White, Lead Pastor of StoneWater Church

Chapter 3. The Tale of Two Kingdoms

Big Idea: We are in a spiritual war that has physical and eternal consequences.

The Tale of Two Kingdoms involves the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light also known as the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of Darkness is led by their prince, Satan. The Kingdom of God is led by their King, Jesus.

1 John 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Because man chose to defer to Satan and disobey God (Genesis 3), God turned over to Satan the authority that man had originally been given in the Garden. It's hard to believe, but Satan actually has legal rights to do what he does. Read the book of Job, and you'll see an example of how God allows him to operate.

Satan is now the prince of this world. Adam and Eve were the governors of the land, but when they bowed the knee to the serpent, they—in essence—gave their governorship to Satan. There's a new governor, and he's not nice.

Here are a couple of ways that Satan exerts his rule:

1. Satan blinded Mankind to the truth about God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)

⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan keeps people in the dark to the truth about God and about life. It's hard to get any real traction in life if you are always in the dark or blind. Our blindness keeps us bumping into the same things, and we have no idea what or why it happened.

2. Satan influences both individuals and culture.

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT)

² Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.^[a] He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

Satan drives the boat of culture. Culture pulls and entices our fleshly desires. We often submit to our fleshly desires. (More about this in the chapters IV-VI.)

3. Satan's tactics are lies and deception.

John 8:44 (NLT)

⁴⁴ For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Revelation 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.*

This word deceiver is the Greek word *planao*—it implies that Satan leads us astray from what is true, moral, and accurate. He is leading us into danger, pain, hurt, and death. His goal is to keep us from finding God’s good, perfect, and eternal plan for our lives. He plays the role of spoiler, and he plays it well.

Now let’s turn to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil and establish his Kingdom.

When Jesus came to earth, he came ready to go to war with Satan and his Kingdom of Darkness. He came as a warrior and a King.

1 John 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

Evidence of the war is seen as early as Jesus’ birth. Jesus was born and immediately King Herod tried to kill him. Herod was full of pride and fear, marks of the Kingdom of Darkness.

Matthew 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

Revelation 12 may give us insight into this war.

Revelation 12:4b-5 (ESV)

⁴ *And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,*

We also see evidence of the war between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness immediately following Jesus’ baptism in Luke 4.

Where Adam lost the battle in the Garden of Eden, Jesus won the battle in the wilderness. Jesus did not succumb to any of Satan’s lies or deception.

Another instance of the war between the Kingdoms is seen every time Jesus exercised his power to heal and cast out demons. The casting out of demons demonstrated that there was a new sheriff in town and his name is King Jesus.

Mark 1:34 (NLT)

³⁴ *So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons.*

Satan attempted to prevent the cross through Peter in Mark 8:32-33. You also see Satan filling Judas in an effort to kill Jesus in Luke 22:3.

At the cross, Jesus showed himself to be the conquering King. Satan and his forces thought they had won the war, but they did not know that the cross was God's plan to redeem mankind and set Jesus up as the conquering King. The climax of the war happened at the cross and empty tomb. In his death and resurrection, Jesus conquered Satan and put him to shame. Bam! (Sorry, I got excited.)

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

In killing Jesus, Satan and his forces made a strategic error. If they would have known what they were doing, they would not have crucified him.

1 Peter 1:17-21 (NLT)

¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So, you must live in reverent fear of him during your time as "foreigners in the land." ¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but he has now revealed him to you in these last days.

²¹ Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

King Jesus conquered sin and death and all the effects of sin. King Jesus broke the curse of death and gave forgiveness and life at the cross and resurrection. Satan no longer has a hold on those who are covered by the blood of Jesus from the cross.

Satan and the Kingdom of Darkness were put to shame at the cross.

Colossians 2:13b-15

Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

Fast forward—following the cross and resurrection, King Jesus now reigns from Heaven. He empowers us, his church (followers) by his Spirit to fight for him and his Kingdom. Our fight is a battle for souls and for life. He is our King and we ride with him.

The game is basically over for the Kingdom of Darkness. There is no possible way that Satan can win. His only move now is to play the role of the spoiler. He continues to blind, lie, and deceive. He tries to spoil victories that Christians have in this life. He knows his time is short, so while here, he will continue to fight and keep as many as possible from the light of Jesus the conquering King.

How Do We Respond?

King Jesus promises to return one day with the armies of Heaven. Life as we know it will be over, and at that point, we who believe will be ushered into the eternal Kingdom of God (Heaven) and those who do not believe will depart into the eternal Kingdom of Darkness (Hell).

Until then there are two things that need our attention.

1. Pledge your life to King Jesus.

John 12:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ *I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.*

Mark 8:34-36 (ESV)

³⁴ *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.*

The way of God's Kingdom is very different. In order to win life, we must give up our life and follow Jesus. We pledge our lives to him.

Colossians 1:13 (ESV)

¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...*

When we trust Jesus as our Savior and King, our citizenship is transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of God.

2. Fight for your King, Jesus, and His Kingdom.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

As a follower of Jesus, you are a soldier engaged in a war. We wake up every day fighting to live for our King. We fight for our family, our friends, our community, and our world. We fight to bring as many people as possible into the Kingdom of God.

Like it or not, you were born and reborn into a war. It's a war for the Kingdom. The war is for souls. The war has a real enemy. The enemy is a liar, a deceiver, a killer, and a thief. His plan is to keep you in the dark and to leave you wounded. Jesus becomes our conquering King when you trust in him, believe in him, and pledge your allegiance to him. As followers of Jesus, the battle for the Kingdom is why we are still here. We were left to fight for our King.

Our King has given us weapons to fight and knowledge to engage in warfare.

We are in a spiritual war that has physical and eternal consequences.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Describe a time in your life that you pledged your life to King Jesus.
2. Why should this war be important to you and your family?
3. What do you think fighting for King Jesus may look like in your life?

Section I: The War

Group Questions (GQs)

1. Introduce yourself and share an area of your life where you have recently experienced a “win.”

This could be something small like finding gas for \$2.99 per gallon or something big like you recently got married. No pressure; the goal is to give people a glimpse into your life.

2. What is one thing in chapter 1 that struck a chord with you?

If you get stuck, discuss question 2 from chapter 1.

3. In chapter 2, we looked at the Fall of Mankind. Describe how life in the Garden of Eden may have been before sin entered the world.

Feel free to look at Genesis 1-2.

4. Have someone volunteer to read Genesis 3 aloud.

- Describe the interaction the serpent had with Eve.
- Where did Adam lose the battle?
- What else stands out to you from this story?

5. What brokenness in the world stirs your heart with compassion?

The key here is to remember that all brokenness is a result of sin. Can you identify the sin in each case of brokenness?

6. In Chapter 3, what is a Bible verse or passage that grabbed your attention and why?

Read the verse or passage out loud.

7. Is there anyone in this group that would like to share their story of pledging their lives to King Jesus?

This is your salvation story.

8. What do you think fighting for King Jesus may look like for us as a group?

Think through how this group can encourage each other in this fight of faith.

Section II: The Enemy (ies)

Written by: Jeremy White, Lead Pastor of StoneWater Church

Chapter 4: The Flesh and the World

Big Idea: The flesh, the world, and the devil all work in cahoots to thwart God's plan for your life.

Every week before my son's football team goes into battle under the Friday night lights, his coaches work together to give the team a scouting report. The coaches these days are way more advanced than in my day. My son and his teammates receive a detailed description of their opponents' plays, tendencies, players to watch, and even videos of their opponents running their key plays. Then, they get a game plan for that specific opponent. They may run specialized plays for certain opponents that no one has ever seen before. (Coach, sorry if I'm giving away trade secrets). The goal of the scouting report is to study their opponent and then form a game plan to win the game from the things they know about their adversary.

Think of the next three chapters as a scouting report on our enemy. As you read, my hope is that we as a church begin to form a game plan that will bring victory in our lives.

Our first enemy is known as The Flesh. The Flesh is the desire to sin that remains even after conversion to Jesus.

Galatians 5:16-21 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Before Jesus is our King, the flesh dominates us. After Jesus is King in our lives, the dominion of the flesh is broken but is still a potent force. The flesh and the Spirit oppose each other. Your flesh is that part of you that still wants to sin.

Have you ever wanted to do something that you knew was wrong? The voice that screams for rebellion inside of you is your flesh.

In the passage above, Paul not only helps us identify the flesh but also gives us insight in how to conquer the flesh. Look back at Galatians 5:16, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

The answer to not giving in to the flesh is walking by the Spirit. At the moment of salvation, the Spirit of God lives inside of us. Walking by the Spirit simply means to be in step or in tune with God. Walking in the Spirit requires us to stay connected with God through disciplines like prayer, reading his Word, worship, engaging in community with other believers, confessing our sins, enjoying sabbath, and having a humble heart. Those are all plays that we run to slow down, connect to Jesus, and walk by the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit is like mowing your grass—it must be done over and over, and if not, a jungle develops.

As loud as your flesh screams, the Spirit cheers for peace and humility. The indicator in your life that you are walking in the Spirit is that spiritual fruit begins to grow and ripen in your life. Gal. 5:22 reveals this fruit.

Galatians 5:22-23, NLT

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

A second enemy that we face in this war is the world.

The world is the persuasive system of ideas, beliefs, values, goals, standards, role models, methods, rewards, and lifestyle that is presumed to be “normal” and appeals to the flesh in us all.

The world is being directed by the devil. He sets the agenda of the world. He often works through governments, the influential upper class, media, and other influences that are living apart from Jesus to influence the world in a way that reflects darkness.

Paul describes the world and its relationship with the devil and all of us.

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT)

² Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

The world is the current of culture that pulls us to do what everyone else is doing. The world tugs on our flesh to rationalize what we are doing by saying, “Everyone else is doing it so it must be okay.” The truth is that it is not okay with our King Jesus and actually angers Him.

Look around society and you can start picking out messages of the World. The messages of the world always encourage us to slide away from God. The world tugs on the deceitfulness in our hearts towards selfishness, pride, and hurtfulness. The world confuses our identity, pollutes our sexuality, neuters men’s masculinity, and lessens women’s femininity. The world is always attacking our minds with messages of lies.

Knowing this, provides us with the secret to counter the world’s attacks. The way that we war with the world is by allowing God to transform our minds. In other words, we have to think biblically.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Scripture is truth. We read Scripture and our minds become saturated with truth. As our minds become saturated in truth, it becomes easier to recognize the lies and deception of the world.

The big idea of this section reads:

The flesh, the world, and the devil all work in cahoots to thwart God’s plan for your life.

In order to help explain how the flesh, the world, and the devil work together, I need you to picture a guitar. A guitar player plays the instrument which is made up of a guitar body and strings. The body represents the flesh, the strings represent the world, and the player is the devil (for all you Charlie Daniels fans, this illustration may have happened in Georgia). The devil picks the strings of the world. The strings of the world resonate with the body of the flesh, and BAM, we begin to hear the music.

For example, Satan desires to war against marriages that honor God. He uses pornography and strums it into media, magazines, billboards, phone screens, internet ads, and anywhere that he can influence in the world. The pornography resonates with the flesh of men and also women. Before you know it, a spouse is hooked and beginning to compromise the integrity of their marriage. Doors begin to open to other things that are darker and that defile the marriage bed. Within a matter of time, the marriage, if not fought for by one or both spouses, heads towards destruction and the Kingdom of Darkness claims a victory.

You can play that tune with any temptation you find in this world.

Galatians 5

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

The devil strums the strings of the world that make our flesh want to respond by sinning. We will get into more of the devil's game plan in the next two chapters.

Big Idea: The flesh, the world, and the devil all work in cahoots to thwart God's plan for your life.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Re-read Galatians 5:16-21 and jot down two or three works of the flesh that you fight against.
2. Describe a time in your life when you felt as if you were truly walking by the Spirit.
3. What are three messages of the world that you can identify that are harmful to your family?
4. Pray and ask God for his truth to quickly spot messages of the world.

Section II: The Enemy (ies)

Written by: Jeremy White, Lead Pastor of StoneWater Church

Chapter 5: The Devil

Big Idea: The flesh, the world, and the devil all work in cahoots to thwart God's plan for your life.

The devil, also known as Satan, is a spirit being and serves as the head over the demonic world.

It's easy to make two mistakes when thinking about the devil. One mistake is to discount or overlook his power and influence. The second is to make him out to be more than he is. In other words, to make too little of him or to make too much of him.

1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Make no mistake, he is to be respected as you would respect a lion or animal that acts as a fierce predator.

The comfort that we hold on to as followers of King Jesus is that our King is greater than and more powerful than the hell-raising prince known as the Devil.

1 John 4:4 (NLT)

⁴ But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

To give you a better picture of the devil, here are some things that he is not:

The Devil is Not:

- *All powerful*, but he does have great power. He is not a cartoon with a pitchfork and pointed tail. He is real and he is powerful.
- *All knowing*, but he has great knowledge. He is part of a demonic network of information.
- *Present everywhere*. He is a localized being with a huge demonic following allowing him to affect matters all over the world through his agents. Think of his demonic agents as being a highly organized network of workers with thousands of years of experience and information.

Here are some things that he most certainly is:

The Devil is:

- *Powerful*, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10
- *Extremely shrewd*, Ezekiel 28:12,17
- *Ruthless*, Luke 11:4
- *A Liar, deceiver, Father of Lies*, John 8:44
- *A Murderer*, John 8:44
- *A Sinner from the beginning*, 1 John 3:8
- *A Thief*, John 10:10

Here are some titles of the devil found in the Bible:

Titles of the Devil:

- *The Prince of Demons*, meaning he is the ruler of the fallen angels. Demons are subject to him.
- *The Ruler of this world*, referring to the fact that he is directing the world and setting its agenda. He does this within the boundaries set by God. Martin Luther said, “He is the devil, but he is God’s devil.” Remember, even the devil is subject to God.
- *God of this Age*, meaning he is the one worshiped as people seek anyone other than the one true God through Jesus. As he blinds people and they worship gods other than Jesus, and it is in fact the devil who receives that worship.
- *Accuser of the Brothers*, meaning he goes before God making accusations about followers of King Jesus.

Revelation 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Can you picture him standing before the courts of God just like he did in the book of Job, saying things like, “These people are not worth it. Did you see what they did? They claim to be yours but look how they bow to other idols.”

We learn in Romans 8:34 that our King Jesus is interceding for us. He sits beside the Father in Heaven deflecting the accusations by pointing to the cross. Every accusation that Satan, the Accuser, makes is nullified by the cross for everyone who calls Jesus King.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you tend to make too little of the devil or make too much of the devil? Why do you think you lean that direction?
2. What is a characteristic of the devil that you have not thought much about before reading today?
3. Describe what it means to you that Jesus is constantly interceding on your behalf.

Chapter 6: Game Planning for the War

Big Idea: The flesh, the world, and the devil all work in cahoots to thwart God’s plan for your life.

It’s time that we begin to game plan for the war against our enemy. Let’s look at 4 ways that we are to fight.

4 Ways to Fight:

1. Be aware of Satan’s Tactics.

1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

We have to keep our eyes wide open and peeled for anything that moves because there is a lion on the loose. Below is a summary of the war tactics that he employs. A tactic is a play that the devil runs in order to take us off course from our King Jesus or to bring woundedness in our lives.

Tactics of Satan:

- **Persecution** (Rev. 2:10; John 16:1-4). He works to apply pressure to conform to the world's values and thinking. He will use your family, your job, friends, media, threats, worldly logic, appeals to your need to belong, threat of being excluded, or even suffering and tribulation.

Revelation 2:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

- **False Teachers** (Matt. 13:24-40; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). Read Matthew 13 and you will see how the devil plants false brothers and sisters in the church. Behind the curtain of every false teacher, you'll find the devil pulling their strings. Here are a couple of examples.
 - **Legalism** is an example that showed itself in the early church and also today as a false teaching. Legalism is the gospel plus something.
 - **Syncretism** is another example. Syncretism is combining the gospel with another belief. In the New Testament, they were mystics or Gnostics, believing that there was this special secretive mystical knowledge that only few understood. Today, it would look like someone claiming that Jesus is the way to God and Buddha is also a way to God. Muhammed and Confucius are yet other examples.
- **Temptation** (1 Cor 7:5). Good old-fashioned temptation to sin is a very common strategy of Satan.

1 Corinthians 7:5 (ESV)

⁵ *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

- **Removing the Word from the Mind of Seekers.**

Luke 8:12 (ESV)

¹² *The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

- **Rationalizing a sinful lifestyle** (Romans 6:1-2; Corinthians). Another strategy the devil uses is rationalizing a sinful lifestyle. If you ever start a sentence with, "Well, that's not what the Bible really says," you may be guilty of rationalizing.
- **Divisions in the church** (James 3:14-4:4). The devil loves to take us off mission and out of the war by causing division and drama among ourselves. Church splits over silly things like the color of carpet, the style of music, the preacher's style of teaching, and petty arguments between church members jockeying for power and position.

James 3:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.* ¹⁵ *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

- **False religious (supernatural) experiences** (1 John 4:1-3; Col. 2). Satan is a manipulator and a showman. He has the ability to stage some pretty incredible religious experiences. Whether it be in the deep jungle of Africa, the swamps of Louisiana, or the screen of television, it is important that we as believers test what we experience with the Bible. If we can't find evidence of what we are experiencing in the Bible, we are walking down a slippery slope.

1 John 4:1-3 (ESV)

⁴ *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.* ² *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,* ³ *and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*

- **Direct Attacks** (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 12:7). Direct attacks by the demonic physically, mentally, and spiritually are very possible in the lives of believers. Sometimes, these attacks are very evident but most of the time if you are not alert, it is easy to ignore or explain away the truth of direct attacks. Paul described a thorn in his flesh as a messenger of Satan. Christians are not exempt from attacks of the devil. Illness that shows up when you are about to do something for God, a loss of something material when you are trying to live for the Lord, and criticism from those outside the faith

are all examples of common attacks that we see everyday.

2. Arm yourself for battle.

Ephesians 6:14-18 (ESV)

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Ephesians 6:14-18, describes the Armor of God. We will look at this in more depth in the days to come but let's begin to get acquainted with our armor.

1. **Belt of truth** is Scripture. We arm ourselves by tightening up on our Bible obedience.
2. **Breastplate of righteousness** means that we build righteous patterns in our lives.
3. **Shoes of peace** looks like forgiving and living at peace with people as we are ready to share the gospel.
4. **Shield of faith** declares that God is faithful to you and believing that you can trust Him.
5. **Helmet of salvation** means that you are confident that you are actually saved.
6. **Sword of the Spirit** is being able to verbally answer the enemy hit for hit with Scripture.
7. **Pray in the Spirit** means that we are continually in an attitude of prayer, listening for God's guidance.

3. Walk in the Spirit by submitting to God.

Walking in the Spirit is being in total submission to God.

James 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

To submit means that you willingly place yourself under someone. To submit to King Jesus means that we willingly place ourselves under his authority. Walking in the Spirit is walking in the will of our King.

Ephesians 5:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,

A drunk is under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol controls his behavior. Walking in the Spirit means that we are completely under the influence of the Spirit of God. Our behavior is controlled by our King. This is one more way to fight the enemy.

4. Destroy any of the devil's strongholds in your life.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (ESV)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Almost every one of us has strongholds in our lives. A stronghold is an area of our life where we have allowed the devil to set up shop and bring havoc.

I love to watch old school classic western movies. In many western movies the scene will be a fort in the middle of nowhere. The fort is the base of operation for horse soldiers who are there to expand their footprint. A stronghold is similar to a strong fort that the devil has in our lives with the goal of expanding his influence.

The way the stronghold develops is by continued and repeated sin over time. For the Christian who has an un-surrendered area of their life to Jesus, there is almost always a stronghold taken by the devil. Strongholds may be a result of continued sexual sin, pride, selfishness, bitterness, anger, greed, or any other idol in the life of a believer.

When Satan is allowed to have a stronghold in our lives, it reveals that Jesus is not truly ruling as king in that portion of our lives. The way that we destroy strongholds is through confession, repentance, rebuking of the devil to leave, and placing Jesus as King of that area in your life.

In that prayerful process, the stronghold is destroyed and Jesus becomes King of that area again.

The verse above says that we have divine power to destroy strongholds. In the future chapters, we will be looking at weapons that our King gives us to fight the battles before us and destroy strongholds. King Jesus is a great King. He desires for us to live in freedom, and he gives us the power to do it!

Questions for Reflection:

1. What was one of Satan's tactics that you feel that you have faced in life?
2. What does "walking in the Spirit" look like in your life?
3. What is an area of your life where a stronghold may exist?

Section II: The Enemy (ies)

Group Questions (GQs)

1. Start off group time by sharing one spiritual “win” from this past week.
2. Between the three enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil, which do you tend to think about least? Most?
3. Using the guitar illustration from chapter 5, describe how the devil, the world, and the flesh are in cahoots using real-life examples.
4. What is one of Satan’s tactics that you have faced in your life? Explain.
5. What do you believe are the top three strongholds’ in the lives of believers today?
6. Read aloud, *James 4:7, Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* What are some practical ways that you submit to the Lord? What are some practical ways that you resist the devil?
7. How can this group help each other live out James 4:7?

Section III: Angels and Demons

Written by: Brian Bagley, StoneWater Granbury Campus Pastor

Chapter 7: Immortal Combat

Scripture: Psalm 91:1-16

Key Verse: Psalm 91:1, “The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty.”

When my military unit deployed to Iraq, we took many force protection measures, like building a well-defended perimeter and placing guards at the entrances to the base. While we were on the base, we experienced a greater level of protection and freedom. We could eat and sleep knowing that we were protected. That is not to say there were no threats to those inside the base. We could still experience accidents or enemy rocket attacks. Sometimes, the enemy would try to get through the guards at the gate, but life in the perimeter was relatively safe. However, once we left the safety of the base perimeter, we were in hostile territory. The levels of threat were much higher, and our freedoms were exchanged for increased safety measures to protect us while on mission.

Many people want the protection of God, but they are not willing to *remain* under His protection. That may seem like a contradiction, but it happens all the time. Psalm 91:1 instructs us that God’s protection extends to the one who *dwells* in His shadow. In other words, if we want the protection of God, our obedience to His commands places us in a position to receive His protection. When we dwell inside the perimeter of God’s Word, we live in His shadow. We get the benefits of protection that His Word provides. When we reject God’s Word, then we are wide open to demonic work.

When we are idolaters, we tend to want the protection of God on our terms. If we want God to protect our marriage and family, then we must follow His ways concerning marriage and family. If you are cohabitating or living in a homosexual “marriage,” then you are not able to experience God’s protection. God’s resources (including angelic help) are not available to your “marriage” because you are outside the perimeter of God’s Word on marriage. On the contrary, such relationships invite increased demonic work in the souls of those who participate. God is the only one who can define marriage, because He is the one who created it. He repeatedly defines marriage as one man and one woman joined together in a public covenant (Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:18-24, Matthew 19:4-6, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Ephesians 5:22-33).

Angelic help in Scripture is always associated with obedience to God’s commands (1 Kings 19:1-8, Daniel 3:1-30, Daniel 6:1-24, Matthew 4:1-11, Acts 5:17-21, Acts 12:6-11). Demonic activity in Scripture is always associated with disobedience to God’s commands (Genesis 3:1-7, Genesis 6:1-4, Ezekiel 28:1-17, Matthew 16:23). Sometimes it is the disobedience of someone else which brings demonic activity into your life. That is why sexual immorality is so dangerous. Many in our society claim that adults can do anything in the privacy of their bedroom. This libertarian and sinful view of sex is endangering our communities and families. No one can do whatever they want in their own bedroom without immediate and lasting spiritual consequences.

If we want God to protect our souls from demonic attack, then we must separate ourselves from our coping mechanisms and turn to Him instead. Rather than trust in drugs, control, manipulation, or sexual immorality to cope with pain and suffering, we must use the resources of God such as forgiveness, prayer and His Word. We must cease our worship of the creation and worship the Creator (Romans 1:25). While obedience is no guarantee of an easy life, nor does it mean there will be no demonic attacks, it does mean the resources of heaven are just a prayer away (Psalm 91:11-12, Philippians 4:19, Matthew 6:25-34, Jeremiah 33:3).

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are the persistent sins in your life? If you can't think of any, ask your spouse or someone who knows you well. These are most likely demonic strongholds. Ask the Holy Spirit for His observations and insights about your life. Write down whatever comes to mind.
2. Let's invite angels to come to our aid! Make a list of areas where you are struggling to trust God. Pray to Him about each specific area and tell Him that you want to trust Him (Jeremiah 33:3). Repent from your unbelief and ask God to grow your faith (1 John 1:9).
3. Ask for the members of your group to pray with you about each one (James 5:16). God will give His angels orders concerning these requests (Psalm 91:11).

Section III: Angels and Demons

Written by: Brian Bagley, StoneWater Granbury Campus Pastor

Chapter 8: Guardian Angels

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-18

Key Verse: Hebrews 2:16, “For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.”

Angels are greatly misunderstood in our society today. Caricatures of angels exist that depict them as childlike creatures with harps and halos, such as Precious Moments collectibles. Another common misconception is that angels are the souls of loved ones who died and passed from this life to heaven. There is even a popular Christmas movie called “It’s a Wonderful Life” that illustrates this erroneous belief. Angels, rather, are masculine creatures that have existed before the Lord formed the earth (Job 38:1-7). The Bible is not silent on the topic of angels; therefore, the best questions to ask are, “What has God said about these heavenly beings and what, if anything, should we do in response to His Word on the matter?”

There are three broad categories of angels: cherubim, seraphim and teraphim. Cherubim, also referred to as archangels, are the largest and most powerful angels and they reside around God’s throne. Michael and Gabriel are two cherubim that Scripture reveals to us. Satan was also once a cherubim. Seraphim are the second order of angels and they move back and forth between heaven and earth serving as messengers. The third order of angels is the teraphim who reside on the earth and can take human form when necessary.

We should consider how angels help us accomplish the work the Lord has set before us. Angels benefit God’s people in various ways. First, angels are often referred to as “watchers.” Daniel 4:13 states, “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.” These angels are responsible for watching what is happening to God’s people. These angels see and report activity to the Lord. Christ warns us against causing children to stumble in their faith because their angels will report those actions to heaven (Matthew 18:10). Spiritual forces are constantly observing us. This should bring us comfort and caution at the same time. It is comforting to know that we are always under the watchful eye of the hosts of heaven no matter the difficulty or circumstances. On the other hand, we should be vigilant to resist when tempted to yield to our flesh, knowing that the angels are also present to witness such treachery.

Angels work to protect God’s people. Daniel 6:22 informs us, “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Daniel was not alone in the lions’ den. An angel of the Lord was with him to shut the mouths of the lions.

Angels can deliver God’s people from bondage. In Acts 5:18-19, the Bible describes how government officials “arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out.”

Angels serve to strengthen and encourage us. In Matthew 4:11, “the devil left [Jesus], and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.” Jesus was starving from his fast and ensuing temptations from the devil, but angels were there to serve him at the command of the Father.

Angels respond to our prayers. Acts 10:1-7 and Acts 12:5-11 record prayers that prompted angelic intervention. When God’s people pray, those prayers move the hosts of heaven to act on behalf of God’s people. Daniel 10:1-14 describes how multiple angels came to the prophet’s aid in response to his prayer and fasting. After receiving orders from God to assist Daniel, demonic forces prevented an angel from responding to Daniel’s prayers. The opposition required the intervention of the archangel Michael. God’s people should persist in prayer even when

the answers do not seem to come quickly (Luke 18:1-8). Never doubt the power of prayer.

Angels carry out the judgment of God, whether it be good or bad. In Genesis 18 and 19, angels warned Abraham and Lot of the impending judgment against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In 2 Kings 19 an angel struck down the Assyrian army that mocked God and sought to destroy the city of Jerusalem. In Matthew 13:50, Jesus instructs that the angels will cast those who reject Him into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. On the other hand, those who accept Christ as Lord and submit their lives to Him have an angelic escort into heaven when they die. Luke 16:22 recounts the story of angels who carried Lazarus to the side of Abraham after his death.

We should be careful not to worship or pray to angels. Whenever humans encountered angels in their heavenly glory in Scripture, the people usually fell to the ground in fear; the angels always corrected that response. Angels know that God alone is worthy of worship and humans should only bow to God. Angels take orders directly from God, and we should not try to command them. It is appropriate to pray to God and let Him know the concerns of our heart and mind. He will provide for our needs using the resource that He desires, whether it be angels or something else.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some of the caricatures of angels that you have witnessed?
2. Have these caricatures caused you to make too little or too much of angelic power? Explain.
3. Read and consider Hebrews 2:1-18. How are people recipients of God's grace in ways that angels are not? How does this encourage you?

Section III: Angels and Demons

Chapter 9: Dark Spiritual Forces

Scripture: Colossians 2:13-15

Key Verse: Colossians 2:15, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

Demonic forces are real and active in this world. Just as there are caricatures of angels, there are also caricatures of demons as well. Some people imagine demons as red-colored human-looking creatures with horns and pitchforks. Others think of them as ghosts that haunt cemeteries and old homes, while others believe that demons are just a metaphor for evil that exists in the world. However, the Bible not only confirms that they exist, but also reveals we can invite demonic activity either on purpose or by accident. Demonic possession and demonic oppression are real, but by far the most common problem is demonic obsession!

What is meant by “opening the door” of your heart, and how can demons get into the door of your life? The Bible describes our body as the house in which our soul resides (2 Corinthians 5:1). We can grant access to our soul by what we choose to believe and do. God warns Cain in Genesis 4:6-7, “You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” In other words, sin is probing you, observing you, trying to penetrate your soul through an opening. For those familiar with the story, Cain failed to keep sin out of his heart and he grew more angry and bitter toward Abel, eventually killing him. On the other hand, Jesus invites us to open the door of our hearts to Him so that He can come and fellowship with our hearts (Revelation 3:20).

So, how could someone open the door to demonic activity in their life? The primary way is to worship other gods or idols. Now, you may be thinking to yourself, “I don’t have any statues that I worship in my home.” But idolatry is often more sophisticated than simply praying to carved images. An idol is anything we place greater trust and value in than the Lord Christ. Sexual immorality, drug use, occult practices or any addiction can be described as idolatry.

One way to open the door to demonic activity is through participation in sexual immorality. Pornography, prostitution, promiscuity, adultery, transgenderism, pedophilia or homosexuality are just a few of the ways that people can invite demonic activity into their lives through sexual perversion. Idol worship in the ancient world is almost always associated with sexual immorality. Whether the Asherah poles in ancient Israel (Exodus 34:13-17) or the pagan temple prostitutes of the Roman empire (1 Corinthians 6:15-17), sexual immorality was an essential component of idolatry. Today’s obsession with sexual identities and practices reveals how nearly identical the modern world is to its ancient ancestors when it comes to demonic activity. There really is nothing new under the sun.

Seeking out occult practices such as psychics or mediums or simply playing with Ouija boards will open the door of your heart to demonic oppression. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 warns, “There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you.” Reaching out to the dead can seem like an exciting or interesting activity, but the Bible clearly warns that such endeavors lead to destruction. In reality, you are not communicating with the dead, but with demons and devils. These dark forces have only your destruction in mind when you engage them in witchcraft and sorcery. They give advice that might seem right, but it is full of lies and death. Additionally, the media you consume can certainly make room for the demonic in your life. Horror movies and satanic music will focus the attention of a mind and soul on demonic activity for those who consume them.

Drug use is also a doorway to enter a dangerous spiritual realm. Hallucinogenic and mind-altering drugs take you to a spiritual realm unprotected without the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Getting “high” or “buzzed” communicates to dark spiritual forces that you are vulnerable and open to their input. Drug use is a way in which people try to gain spiritual breakthroughs, primarily as a means to address some kind of suffering, circumstance, or shortcoming. However, by entering the spiritual realm apart from the Lord and His Word, you are defenseless to demonic influence.

So how can you limit demonic oppression? Close the doors and windows! Repent from sin and forgive those who have sinned against you. Colossians 2:13-15 states, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Once you make Christ the Lord of your life, the devil has no legal right to your life. Furthermore, when you forgive others’ trespasses against you, you are transferring their debt to the Lord. The demonic “rulers and authorities” have no legal claim on your life. Because of this reality, you can resist dark spiritual forces in the power and authority of God’s Word and His Spirit (1 Corinthians 10:13, James 4:6-8).

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are areas where you may have opened the door to demonic activity into your life?
2. Read and meditate on Colossians 2:13-15.
3. How has God disarmed the power of demonic rulers and authorities? How does this reality encourage you?

Section III: Angels and Demons

Group Questions (GQs)

1. Start off your group time by sharing how you viewed angels and demons as a kid. What formed your views on angels and demons?
2. Read and discuss with your group question 2 from chapter 7: Immortal Combat.
3. What was something new to you from chapter 8?
4. What are ways that people open doors to demonic activity in their lives? Do you have an example of how you may have opened yourself up to demonic activity at some point in your life?
5. Fighting for King Jesus to rule your life often boils down to trusting him. How might the confession of trust in Psalm 91:2 be linked to the relief from fear in Psalm 91:5?
6. Read and discuss Daniel 10:1-14. How have you seen God move through the consistency of prayer? Share honestly with the group about times you have been discouraged by unanswered prayer.
7. End by confessing to your group an area of your life that you need to exercise more trust in God. Pray for one another.

Section IV: The Armor of God

Written by: Brian Bagley, StoneWater Granbury Campus Pastor

Chapter 10: How to Put on the Armor

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-18

Key Verse: Ephesians 6:11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

As a soldier preparing for battle, there are several items that you are issued prior to boarding the plane to take you to a combat zone. It was a brisk December afternoon in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and I was standing in line to receive my new body armor. I was pretty excited because my unit was going to try out some new military gear. Now I had trained with body armor in the past, but it was a much older version. The newer technology meant the upgraded armor we received was more complete, but also much heavier! I remember having to learn how to assemble the new gear, and it took longer than I anticipated.

God provides His children with body armor as well. And much like my experience with military body armor, there is a lot of confusion about how to put on the armor. Some people claim that you just put on the armor of God in your imagination. Others claim it is put on through prayer. While our imaginations and prayers are indeed powerful tools, the Bible provides a different set of instructions about how to wear the armor of God.

When the Bible describes the armor of God, the original Greek translation uses the *ablative of source* case to describe each piece. According to the Blue Letter Bible, the ablative of source case means that “the noun being modified by the noun in the ablative owes its origin in some way to the noun in the ablative.”¹ So for an example, let us examine the term *shield of faith* (Ephesians 6:16). The *shield* is the noun being modified by the ablative *of faith*, therefore the shield owes its existence to faith. Each piece of armor is automatically put on by walking in its source. As you walk in faith, you bring your shield of faith into existence. It is entirely appropriate to pray for faith, but until you actually walk in faith by your actions, you have not brought the armor into reality! Ephesians 6:16 informs us that the shield of faith enables us “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” What are all the fiery darts? They are all the various forms of attack that Satan will bring to bear against the saints of God. Without faith, we are susceptible to all kinds of attacks. Without faith, we will be overcome by our doubts. The Bible declares in 1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

Now it’s important here to give a caution against the Word of Faith movement, or the “prosperity gospel” which seems to be influential in many corners of modern Christianity. The Word of Faith movement teaches that we can simply create the reality that we desire if we exercise enough faith. In such teaching, faith is transformed from the *Biblical* understanding which is trusting God and His good plans despite our circumstances into a *heretical* or *pagan* understanding that faith is a way of creating the health and wealth that we want. Walking in faith does not mean that we demand miracles from God. Our Father is not a holy vending machine to get whatever you want by inserting quarters of faith. But rather He is a loving Father who gives us what we need (Philippians 4:19). He does not exist to serve us, but we exist to serve Him because He purchased our lives with His blood (1 Corinthians 6:20). The Father is also in the business of transforming our minds into the mind of Christ (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 2:5-8), who Himself suffered and died at the hands of men and promised us that we should expect suffering (John 16:33). Death is the last enemy which our Lord Jesus will defeat at His second coming (1 Corinthians 15:25-26), therefore we should expect physical death in our future.

At the same time, the Bible instructs us that suffering brings many good things such as perseverance, endurance, patience, godly character, wisdom, and intimacy with God, just to name a few (Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-6, 1

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/resources/grammars/greek/simplified-greek/ablative-case.cfm>

Peter 4:12-13, Psalms 34:18). None of this is to say that we should seek out suffering or that we should not pray for healing or provision, but we gratefully accept the trials we are given whether easy or difficult (Philippians 4:11-13). Christian history is rich with stories of triumphs and tragedies, but in every case, God is glorified and the faithful are rewarded by Him in the next life (Hebrews 11:1-40). Word of Faith teaches Christians to turn their backs on this magnificent inheritance and trade it for a bowl of soggy corn flakes. The Biblical faith described in Ephesians 6:16 is faith that can handle adversity regardless of how trials may change in severity or duration.

Questions for Reflection:

1. In what ways are you tempted to sin?
2. What are the circumstances in which you are more prone to experience temptation? Are there people or locations you need to avoid?
3. What are Scripture verses that have encouraged you? Have you ever tried to memorize those verses?

Section IV: The Armor of God

Chapter 11: The Helmet and the Sword

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-18

Key Verse: Ephesians 6:17, “and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

As a kid, I grew up playing baseball. I played several positions in the infield, but my favorite position was catcher. I enjoyed putting on all the catcher’s equipment. It was like putting on armor. A foul ball could hit me square in the face, but the catcher’s mask would deflect the ball and protect my head.

As followers of Christ, we have spiritual armor as well. The armor of God is a metaphor that the Apostle Paul uses to illustrate how walking according to the commands of Scripture acts as protection for believers. Protection from what? The Scripture tells us that the armor protects us from the “schemes of the devil.” A scheme is a form of trickery, usually done in a systematic way. That means that the demonic forces are studying you and making plans according to your weaknesses. Temptation is persistent; that is why we are commanded to flee from it (2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Corinthians 10:13). Have you ever noticed that you are often tempted in the same way regardless of the circumstances or location? I have seen people who struggle with substance abuse being offered drugs while on vacation in an unfamiliar city. The temptation seems to find them! Temptation is also opportunistic. When I was struggling with pornography, I knew that the more tired I became, the harder it would be to resist. I decided to go to bed early to eliminate that opportunity to sin!

In Ephesians 6:17, one of the pieces of armor that the Scripture outlines is “the helmet of salvation.” Recall our principle that each piece of armor is put on by walking in its source. What is the link between the helmet and our salvation? What is it about our salvation that protects our mind? For the saints who are in Christ Jesus, salvation is the true reality of our present moment (1 John 5:12). That truth is not based on how we feel or the circumstances we are experiencing. Rather it is grounded in the unchanging person of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, the Apostle Paul instructs us regarding what it means to have the mind of Christ. The reality is that we have access to wisdom which is vastly superior to the wisdom of man. Wisdom that was once hidden is now revealed through the Holy Spirit and cannot be understood apart from the work of the Spirit. Walking in this wisdom brings the helmet of salvation into existence!

One way that a believer can grow in the wisdom of the Spirit is to study the Proverbs. The purpose of Proverbs is to enable God’s people to learn wisdom, discipline and understanding. God’s Word promises guidance to His children who explore and meditate on them (Proverbs 1:1-7).

Another piece of armor described in verse 17 is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” We often think of the “word of God” as the Bible in its written form. The Greek term which we translate for the written word is *logos*. But the word used in this verse is *rhema*, which refers to the spoken word of God. In other words, Paul is telling the believers in Ephesus to quote the word of God in response to temptation from the devil. We are to speak Scripture to directly confront lies with the truth of God’s Word. Jesus used this method in Matthew 4 when He was tempted by Satan. In Matthew 4:3, the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones to bread and break His fast prematurely. However, Jesus defeated the attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Jesus leveraged the power of the Holy Spirit through His ability to recall the *logos* (written word) in order to speak the *rhema* (spoken word).

I remember suffering terrible anxiety attacks after I made the decision to change careers and separate from the military. These anxiety attacks always came on at night when I had time to reflect on the coming changes for our family. One of the ways I would confront this demonic scheme was to quote Psalm 55:22, which says, “Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall.” I would pray this verse

many times throughout the night and day until the anxiety would relent. If you are not already in the habit of doing so, I encourage you to start memorizing God's word so that you will have access to the sword of the Spirit when the attacks come!

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you benefited recently from the wisdom of God?
2. In what areas of your walk with King Jesus do you need to grow in wisdom?
3. What is one new insight that you gained from this chapter?

Section IV: The Armor of God

Chapter 12: The Belt, the Breastplate, and the Shoes

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-18

Key Verse: Ephesians 6:14-15, “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.” (NIV)

I was recently watching a reality TV show about an endurance race that covered hundreds of miles. Each of the athletes in the race had their own reasons for participating—some wanted to win, others wanted the challenge of participating and just hoped to cross the finish line. Several of the competitors insisted that they were on this journey as a way to discover their “truth.” They communicated that truth in their life continued to escape them. It was sobering and sad to hear. However, the search for truth has been going on for thousands of years. Before Jesus was sentenced to crucifixion, Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?”

In a Roman coat of armor, the belt was responsible for holding the armor together and ensuring everything remained in its proper place. If the belt was compromised, the soldier could not fight effectively. Paul describes the first piece of armor to be the “belt of truth.” It is no accident that Paul starts with truth when discussing how to defend against the schemes of the devil. We live in a post-modern society. One of the realities of postmodernism is the belief that everyone can determine what is true for them and there is no absolute truth that applies to all people for all time. However, Jesus declares that He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Peter asserts that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus goes on to say that Peter’s confession is the rock on which Christendom will stand (Matthew 16:13-18). Jesus and His Word is the truth by which we understand reality (John 1:1-18). When we walk in truth, we bring the belt into existence.

The second piece of armor described in this passage is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the heart of the Christian. When we walk in righteousness, our heart is protected. Proverbs 4:3 instructs us to guard our hearts because it determine the course of our lives. Proverbs 13:6 goes further by saying that righteousness guards the way of the blameless. Righteousness has many aspects including who you choose as friends, how you control your appetites, how you honor your parents, and how you approach adversity (Proverbs 12:3, 13:1, 13:6, 13:20). On the other hand, when we walk in unrighteousness, our hearts are open to all kinds of destruction (Proverbs 12:15-16). By walking in righteousness, we bring the breastplate into existence in our lives.

The shoes from the gospel of peace are the final item of armor listed in this passage. What is the connection between shoes and the gospel of peace? Paul is clearly referencing Isaiah 52:7 which says that whenever the gospel is taken to new places, peace is proclaimed and the lies are exposed. Satan seeks to bring about death and destruction but the good news of the gospel is that Christ brings life (John 10:10). Proclaiming the gospel to ourselves and our lost friends is a powerful way to defend against the lies of the enemy. But this gospel gives us boldness, protects us as we go into dangerous places and gives us a peace that passes understanding (Proverbs 28:1, Philippians 4:7). As we walk in the gospel of peace we bring the shoes into existence.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read Psalm 119:9, 11. What is a truth from God’s Word from which you draw strength?
2. Read Romans 3:22. From where does the righteousness of God come? What are the areas of unrighteousness that you have struggled with in the past (anxiety, rage, envy, etc.)? How will you trust God with these battles?
3. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What is the relationship between prayer and the peace of God?

Section IV: The Armor of God

Group Questions (GQs)

1. Start off by playing “2 Truths and a Lie”. Extra points if everyone laughs.
2. What has been your favorite part of meeting as a group so far?
3. Share with the group what you’ve been taught in the past regarding the Armor of God. How has the devotional content strengthened what you already knew? What has challenged your understanding?
4. In order to use the sword of the Spirit, it helps to memorize Scripture. Research and download a Scripture memorization app as a group and agree to memorize one verse each week. Another option is to memorize Bible verses using the Topical Memory System (TMS). You can learn more about the TMS at <https://www.navigators.org/resource/topical-memory-system/>
5. Read Isaiah 26:3. What is the relationship between experiencing personal peace (the shoes) and trusting in God?
6. With which piece of armor are you most confident (salvation, righteousness, faith, peace, God’s Word, or truth)? Least confident? How can you grow in certainty regarding your use of each piece of armor?
7. End your time in prayer.

Section V: The Weapon of Prayer

Written by: Joey White, Church Planting Pastor of StoneWater Church

Chapter 13: From Broken to Whole: Three Life-Changing Prayers.

Big Idea: Jesus can make you whole again by setting you free and restoring your brokenness.

Imagine wrapping your past pain, wounds, and brokenness in a box and giving it all to Jesus. What would go in your personal box of hurts? Would you stuff it full of the pain like Abandonment, Depression, Abuse, Guilt, Death, Shame, Anxiety, Anger, Condemnation, Fear, and Unforgiveness?

My box was filled with anger at God. Where was He when my two-year-old son was diagnosed with cancer? Where was He when I needed Him most during some major struggles at home and work? I believed that God was against me. I could not trust Him, and I certainly could not trust others with the most sensitive areas of my life because I was tired of getting hurt.

I was broken. I thought my brokenness was just my lot in life. I was stuck. I needed healing. I needed to be restored to God and others. I did not know how to fix me.

What about your box? Think way back. What would you put in the box of brokenness from your childhood? Who hurt you? What evil things did evil people do to you? What words cut you to your heart that still have a stranglehold on you today? What sin choices did you make in the past that led to even more pain?

If we take an inventory of our past pain that we did to ourselves or others did to us, our boxes get extremely heavy and we carry a heavy burden. It's no wonder we have problems in our relationship to God and others. Can we admit it? We are broken and need someone to come and make us whole again!

Enter Jesus.

The Bible describes an incredible 40-day journey that Jesus took that launched his ministry. Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness where he fasted and fought in prayer. He returned home to Nazareth and entered his childhood synagogue. (It's one of my favorite places to pray in all of Israel. I hope we can be there together one day.) Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah that day. Those words in that scroll describe exactly what Jesus came to accomplish on earth, and those promises are available to you today.

Luke 4:16-19 (NKJV) So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The greatest news a prisoner can hear is, "Today, you are free!" If your Box of Brokenness is not empty, then Jesus is offering you freedom today. According to Luke 4, the Spirit of God sent Jesus to heal your broken heart and to set you free from the prison you have been in for a long time. What would your life look like if you went to war today and won your freedom over your brokenness?

Here's how:

Weapon of Prayer #1: Salvation.

- Today, you can ask Jesus into your life to save you from all your sin. Pray this:

“Jesus, I have sinned against you. I ask you to forgive me. Forgive me for making choices that are against God. Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for me because of my sin. I receive your forgiveness. I place my faith in you, Jesus. I invite your Holy Spirit to come into my life and guide me. From this day forward, with your help, Jesus, I will live my life for you. Thank you, Jesus, for saving me today. Amen.”

Weapon of Prayer #2: Freedom.

- Imagine being with Jesus at your favorite place. Picture yourself at the beach or in the mountains, but it’s just you and Jesus. Stand with Jesus and give him your Box of Brokenness. Pray this Prayer of Freedom:

“Jesus, you came to set the prisoners free. I have been a prisoner to _____. (Tell Jesus the hurts, wounds and brokenness you put in your box.) Jesus, I am giving you my Box of Brokenness today. Take it from me and destroy it. I never want to be a prisoner to it any longer. Jesus, come and set me free today. Amen.”

Weapon of Prayer #3: Restoration

- Once you are set free, Jesus wants to fully restore you and make you whole. Jesus can set a person free in a moment. Think about it this way, a prison door swings open quickly, but it takes time for a prisoner to adjust to a life of freedom. The Bible calls this discipleship. It’s learning to follow Jesus every day as one of his disciples. Are you willing to fight for total victory in your life by following Jesus each day?

“Jesus, thank you for saving me and setting me free. I commit to follow you each day. I will read the Bible so I can learn truth instead of believing the lies of my own mind and the lies of the enemy, the devil. Jesus, I will surround myself with other believers who will encourage and sharpen me. Restore my heart, soul, mind and strength. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it so hard to admit to being broken?
2. What do you need to put in your Box of Brokenness?
3. Do you believe Jesus can truly set you free and you can be made whole again?
4. Which prayer do you need to pray today?

Section V: The Weapon of Prayer

Chapter 14: Battle Orders: God, What Do You Want Me to Do?

Big Idea: You can learn to hear God's voice.

If you miss this, you missed the whole purpose of life: "Life is all about relationships! A relationship to God and one another."

It was a lightbulb moment that came to me after I started a church in San Diego, California. I was in a grocery store buying fajitas with a new guy that had been attending our church. On aisle 9, he was talking about how God had radically changed his life and marriage. I just walked beside him in awe of God and this guy's brand-new life. I remember silently saying to God, "God, this is what the Christian life is all about, a relationship with You and one another!" The fajitas turned out great, and that life lesson will stick with me forever!

I hope some lightbulbs are starting to turn on in your mind throughout this journey with King Jesus. The next weapon of prayer that I want to introduce to you has everything to do with your relationship to God. In a relationship, people talk to each other. One talks and one listens and then visa versa. We were always told that God wants a relationship with us, but no one ever seemed to get around to teaching us *how* God speaks to us. Yes, we have heard "Pray, read your Bible, and go to church," but that never seemed to practically answer the question.

Question #1: Does God speak directly to people today?

Jesus said, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*" John 10:27-28 (NASB).

The Biblical formula for a relationship with God is this: God speaks. We hear Him, and we follow Him. We must be able to hear God's voice and follow Him. Otherwise, whose voice are we listening to and following? We constantly have four voices battling for supremacy in our life:

1. Our own voice (the flesh)
2. The world's voice
3. The voice of our enemy (the devil)
4. God's voice

Too often, we just listen to the voice that makes the most sense. We must be careful that we do not become like the people in the days of the Judges where, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" Judges 21:25 (NASB). Just doing what makes sense to you may sound like a good idea at first, but if you press into that answer, you find that our heart is wicked and we oftentimes choose sin over following our Savior, Jesus. The goal of hearing from God is to be obedient sons and daughters. If I only did what makes sense to me, then I would never have made the hard decisions of sacrifice to follow Jesus.

God spoke in many different ways to all kinds of people in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the prophet Joel explained an incredible day in the future (when the Messiah comes) that God would pour out His Spirit on people. "*It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."* Joel 2:28-29 (NASB). The moment you invited Jesus into your life, God placed His Spirit inside you.

Question #2: How does God speak to us today?

The way we are able to hear the voice of God is by the Spirit of God in us. Read what the Spirit of God does in you. 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, 16 says, "*That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear*

has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets.¹¹ No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit.¹² And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.¹⁶ For, “Who can know the Lord’s thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?” But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

God, the Holy Spirit, knows the depths of God the Father. None of us know what God is thinking, but the Spirit of God knows the Father perfectly. We have the Spirit of God actively working in our lives, and He is the One who speaks and reveals to us the thoughts of our God. You have the mind of God the Son because you are filled with God the Holy Spirit. God speaks to you through His Spirit. You hear God speak because you have the Spirit of God in you. You obey because you have given full control of your life to God.

Question #3: How can I hear God speak to me?

Listen. That is it! That is the answer! The way we hear God is to learn the discipline of understanding the voice of God among all the other voices in our mind. Yes, it is learned (trial and error). Yes, it is a discipline (like working out). Make no mistake, every believer in Jesus can hear the voice of God. It’s not just for super Christians or clergy. You can do this!

Here’s how to hear God speak:

1. Make certain you have invited Jesus into your life.

- God speaks to you through the Holy Spirit that was placed in you at the moment of salvation.

2. Put the work in on building your relationship with Jesus.

- Spend time with Jesus as a friend (Read John 15:15).
 - Suggestion: Find a comfy and special place where you spend time learning from Jesus. (Chair, front porch, table, etc.)
 - Invite Jesus to literally sit with you. Place an empty chair beside you. Visualize Jesus with you. God will never leave you. (Read John 14:16).
 - Think of prayer like a conversation instead of one-way communication where you do all the talking. Ask Jesus a question like, “Jesus, what changes do you want to make in my life so that I can look more like you?”
 - Listen. Listen. Listen. In the above question, what if—while you were listening to Jesus—this word flashed across your mind: “HOLINESS.” Now, go and read every verse and passage in the Bible that deals with Holiness. Remember, God speaks, we listen, and we obey!
 - What if God does not speak? I will then ask, “God, what am I dealing with right now that I need to trust you with so that I can hear you more clearly?” Many times, I cannot hear God because there’s something that is hindering our relationship—my sins or unforgiveness or I have not done what God already told me to do. Remember, it is about a relationship with God and one another. Restore broken relationships with God or with your fellow man, and then go back to growing your relationship with God.

3. A few warnings:

- Don’t be weird! Let me stress it again, “DON’T BE WEIRD.”
 - There are plenty of weird people out there that go around telling people that God speaks to them and told them to do something that everyone is saying, “That person is absolutely crazy.” Don’t

be that guy.

- The only weird Christians out there are the ones that do not know God's voice. Again, don't be weird, but expect God to speak.
- Don't hurt other people by saying, "God told me this about you..."
 - God speaks to you, and God can speak to them. Trust God to speak to them while you continue to pray for them. You are not God's prophet to other people. Only a very few are called to do that, and you ain't one of them (probably). Seriously, too many immature believers go around hurting others in the church by saying, "God told me to tell you..." Don't be that guy!
- Don't be afraid to fail. Be wise. Take steps of faith. Sometimes you will get it wrong. Learn from it. I thought God told me to go sit in the laundromat one day and He would send someone to me that I need to talk to. I sat there for one hour and no one came. I felt foolish. I left and got upset at God. I just heard God wrong. God was not wrong. I just missed it. No one was hurt except my pride. Don't be afraid to fail.

4. Go for it. Start today.

- Find a place. Invite Jesus to be with you. Speak to Him. Listen for Him to speak to you. Learn to follow Him. Learn to hear His voice. Don't be afraid to fail. Don't hurt anyone. Don't be weird. Your Bible should become your most prized possession. Again, don't be weird. Remember, only weird Christians cannot hear the voice of God. It takes work. Put in the work. Be disciplined. Be wise. Make certain that everything aligns with Scripture. God will never tell you something that contradicts Scripture, ever!

Getting Your Battle Orders: Pray, "God, What Do You Want Me to Do?"

What if you wake up each day eager to meet with Jesus, dive into His Word, and receive His to do list for the day? Find that special secret place that you meet with your Savior (Read Psalm 91). Invite Jesus to meet with you. Open up the Bible where you stopped reading yesterday. (I encourage you to start in the Book of John.) Read it. Discuss it with Jesus. (Example: *Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:35 NLT*).

Ask Jesus, "How do I come to you more and take this bread in my life, marriage, raising my kids and grandkids?"

Now Listen. Maybe another verse of Scripture comes to mind. (Go find it and read it.) Maybe a picture flashes across your mind of you being rude to your wife (confess it to Jesus and go apologize to your spouse). Maybe an old friend comes to mind that you have not spoken to in years. (Pray for them immediately. Contact them. Say to them, "I miss you. How are you doing?" Look for opportunities to encourage them in the Lord.) Perhaps you hear or see Jesus say, "Do Not Fear." (It reminds you of a specific fear you have dealt with for a long time, and you immediately know Jesus is saying, "Trust Me and do not continue in that fear." So you pray again to Jesus, "Forgive me for my fear and not fully trusting You. Today, I choose faith over my fear. Jesus, walk with me and I will not fear because I know you are with me. Amen.")

That's how you grow in spiritual maturity. That's how you pray. That's how you get your orders from Jesus for the battle for each day. That's how we change the world. That's how you find out what God wants you to do! It's not a science. It's a relationship. Sometimes you will mess up. Remember, Don't Be Weird. Love One Another. Encourage One Another. Be Wise.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you believe that God speaks to you? If so, what is something that God has spoken to you recently?
2. What stories in the Bible come to mind of God speaking to people?

3. What are some fears you have about God speaking to you on a regular basis?

4. What excites you about God speaking to you on a regular basis?

Section V: The Weapon of Prayer

Chapter 15: Effective Prayer: Add These 4 Prayers to Your Arsenal of Weapons

Big Idea: Effective Prayer is a weapon that builds up the Church and destroys the work of our enemy, the devil.

Why We Use Anointing Oil.

God commanded His people Israel to use olive oil for purification purposes. The anointing oil used by the priests throughout the Old Testament was to make the objects in the temple holy. The main purposes of anointing oil throughout the Bible was for purification and holiness. The brother of Jesus instructs us this way,

“Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. ¹⁴ Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.” James 5:13-15 (NLT)

We are instructed to anoint the sick with oil. The olive oil does not heal them like an ointment or medicine. Jesus heals the sick. Our part is to pray in faith and anoint with oil. Our staff has carried out these exact instructions so many times at church and at our offices. Our StoneWater Family comes to us asking for prayer, and we anoint them with oil and pray for them. God is the one who brings the healing. We simply obey his instructions found in the Bible on how to pray for the sick. It's awesome. God has healed many people in our church this way from many different sicknesses and diseases. Hallelujah!

#1. Praying for Your Home.

“...choose today whom you will serve...But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:14-15 (NLT)

Your home should be a place of peace, rest, worship, and drawing closer to your family. Is it currently for you? Yes or no?

My wife and I have lived in 14 different homes over the last 25 years. The one constant in all that chaos of moving was God. He is always with us (and you). We never moved without Him. Many times throughout our marriage, our home was not a place of peace in rest. In fact, there was a season that I did not want to be home, but I would rather stay away or stay outside. Why? Because my home was the front lines of spiritual warfare, and we were losing.

I have seen it many times throughout my ministry. Weird things happening in people's homes (TVs that were unplugged that still turned on, dishes flying across the room, water damage galore, demonic spirits hovering over the bed, kids with unrelenting night terrors, fear, fear, and more fear). I have known three families that locked whole parts of their homes because the spiritual warfare and demonic activity was so great that they stopped going in there. Imagine not having access to your own home because the devil lives upstairs. People do this because they are afraid (and rightfully so). People do this because they believe they cannot tell anyone (no one wants to appear crazy). People do this because they don't know what to do. (Is there really a number for *Ghostbusters*...cue the music, “Who ya gonna call...”)

Jesus is always the answer! The Bible teaches us (Read 1 John 4:4) that greater is Jesus that lives in you (and your home) than the devil that lives in this world (or upstairs). If you need to restore peace in your home, you need to add this prayer to your arsenal of prayers.

Step 1 - Get some anointing oil. (Any oil will work. Olive oil was used in the Bible.)

Step 2 - Anoint your home. Start with all your outside doors. Put some oil on your hand and wipe a little on the door frame of your home. If there is a specific room or place in your home that “gives you the willies,” go to that room and anoint the doors. For us, we have anointed our kids’ beds many times because they were experiencing terrible dreams and spiritual warfare in their rooms. Demonic harassment is real, and we should not be surprised when our family is tormented by our enemy. Call it whatever you want, but the devil and his army is real, and they want to kill, steal and destroy you because you follow Jesus. Remember, Jesus is greater than them, so we have nothing to fear when we fight with the right weapons.

Step 3 - Our part is oil, prayer, and faith. Exercise all three! After you put the oil throughout your home, now it’s time to pray. What do you pray? There’s no magic prayer. It’s about a relationship with Jesus. Focus your attention on Him because He is the one who is going to bring peace to your home. Here’s an example of what I have prayed.

“Dear God, thank you for giving us this home. Today, we declare that this home belongs to King Jesus. Our home and our lives have been bought by the blood of Jesus. We anoint our home with oil, and we come to you, God, in faith. God, anything that is from you is welcome in this home. Anything that is not from God is no longer welcome here. In the name of Jesus, we command everything that is from the devil to leave our home and not return. In Jesus’ name, get out! God, we ask you to send your warring Angels to come and protect our home, our children, my spouse, and me. We believe, God, that you will remove this spiritual warfare from our home and make our home a place of peace. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

#2. Praying for Healing.

Jesus gave his disciples these instructions in Luke 10:8-9 (NLT), *“If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you now.’”*

Jesus heals. Our part is faith, prayer, and oil. It takes the pressure off of us knowing that Jesus is the one healing. We should all pray for the sick. Medicine is not sinful. Going to the doctor is wise. But don’t make praying for the sick the very last option. I encourage you to pray for all kinds of healing first, for everything like headaches, fever, colds, Covid, back pain, arthritis, cancer, hearing, eye sight, hair loss. (Maybe not hair loss, but why not? Go for it.)

Prayer is simply talking to God, listening, and obeying. I have personally seen many people healed by God. The reason I see more healings than the average Christian is because I pray for healing more than the normal Christian. I have seen God heal more people this year than I did five years ago. The reason I believe I am seeing greater numbers of people healed is because I do it on a weekly basis. I have greater faith because I have seen God do it over and over again. Challenge: I encourage you to pray for 100 people and record the results. As my faith increases, my frequency of praying for people increases. Try it this week, and see what God can do. We have people all around us who are sick in small ways and big. Pray for them all.

Pro Tip: Make it personal to the person. Make it about Jesus healing them and not about you! Don’t be weird!

Step 1 - Ask the person to describe what is going on.

Step 2 - Ask them if you can pray for God to heal them.

Step 3 - Ask them if you can place your hand on their shoulder to pray.

Step 4 - Pray something like, “Jesus, you healed people in the Bible, and I know you heal people today. You know my friend Jonathan here. You created him. You love him. You will never leave him or forsake him. Jesus, you are right here with us now. Jesus, I ask you to come and touch Jonathan. Heal his cancer. To this cancer in his body, Jonathan and I agree and we say that you are not from God. We command cancer to leave his body in Jesus name. Jesus, I know you can heal Jonathan from cancer completely. I love Jonathan. God, I believe You have big things for Jonathan to do for Your Kingdom for a long time to come. Jesus, will you come right now and restore Jonathan to complete health so that he can continue the work of God unhindered by this disease? If this is a spiritual attack from our enemy, we command this assignment to be destroyed now in Jesus’ name. Jesus, come and do a mighty work of healing in Jonathan’s life. We praise You, God. We worship You for Your healing today for Jonathan. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.”

Step 5 - “Jonathan, thank you for letting me pray for you. I am going to continue to pray for you until God heals you completely. We will battle this together. You are my Brother in Christ, and I love you.”

#3. Praying for Your Marriage.

Jesus teaches us that he purposes to give us an abundant life here on earth. Conversely, the devil is here to destroy all the works of God in our lives. Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.”* John 10:10 (NASB)

Look at your spouse and say, “You are not my enemy!” Marriage is tough. Two selfish individuals come together in holy matrimony, and are supposed to live happily ever after. It just does not work that way. With God at the center of your relationship, your marriage can not only survive, but you can have an abundant marriage. Prayer is one of the greatest weapons in your marriage. You do so many things together; it’s time to start praying together. It may be odd to pray with one another in the beginning, but so was your honeymoon. Both take lots of practice, and both will make or break your marriage. I have heard it said many times in many ways that couples that pray together daily rarely get a divorce. Here’s how to start praying together:

Step 1 - Take the initiative. Someone has to say, “Can we pray together today?”

Step 2 - Hold hands. Put your arm around each other. Hold each other. Connect physically because you are about to connect spiritually.

Step 3 - Someone should go first without any expectation the other one is going to pray. You may have to pray for one year before your spouse comes out of their shell to pray for you out loud. Lead by example. It’s worth it.

Step 4 - Pray something like, “God, thank you for putting us together. I love Betty. You created her perfectly. You created her for me. Give me the strength to lead her and love her like Jesus loves His Bride, the Church. God, I need your help to bring out all of her gifts and talents. Forgive me for not being the husband that you called me to when we first got married. I am not that person anymore because of what Jesus has done in me. God, I speak life into my wife. I bless her now in Jesus' name. Thank you, God for the wife she is and the mom that she is to our kids. God, help her at work this week to love her boss and coworkers. Use her at our church in all the areas she serves. Please protect her as she travels to her mom’s this weekend. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

#4. Praying for Your Kids.

Your kids are your greatest legacy. They need you. They struggle with all sorts of things. They will struggle with relationships, porn, social media, their identity, anger, insecurities, and siblings. This is a normal week. Imagine 18 years of living in your home and all the questions and problems they must navigate. They need you and they need your prayers.

Pro Tip 1: Pray for them daily and with them regularly.

Pro Tip 2: I would rather that my kids mess up at home while I can still guide them instead of going off to college where I will not be as involved in their lives. Messing up as a teenager is not the end of the world and may actually be a blessing.

Spiritual Warfare Prayers for Your Kids:

If your child is struggling with things like porn, sex, pot, suicidal thoughts, anger, gender confusion, depression, etc., you need to deal with it out of great love and grace. You also need to confront spiritual warfare that is trying to kill, steal, and destroy your son or daughter. For example:

“God, you created my daughter perfectly. I love her and our family is so much better because you have given her to us. Susan is struggling with suicidal thoughts. God, I know these thoughts are not from you. They must be from our enemy. So, God, we come to You tonight in the name of Jesus asking you to remove these harmful thoughts. Jesus, you come and speak truth into Susan. Jesus, you love her. You have an incredible plan for her life. Jesus, you have a perfect husband out there tonight that is praying for her. You want to give her kids. You want to bless her life. You desire for her to live an abundant life. Jesus, please come right now and destroy these evil thoughts of death and bring life to her. Thank you, God, for trusting me to be her dad. Please give me wisdom to lead her and love her. Her mom and I are not mad at her and we are so glad that these suicidal thoughts were brought out into the light so You, God, can put an end to them. Thank you for Susan. Thank you that you are healing her now. Walk with us through this time and make us stronger as a family. In Jesus name, Amen.

A Reminder About Angels and Demons.

It’s all real. Jesus is real. Satan is real. Angels are real. Demons are real. How do we know it? God teaches us throughout the Bible of the reality of the spiritual realm that is just as real as the physical world we live in.

Christians have been bought by the blood of Jesus, and we literally belong to Him. God has placed His Spirit in us, and no one can snatch us away from Him.

Christians cannot be possessed by a demon. However, we can be harassed and tormented by demons. Spiritual warfare is a real part of the Christian life, and it should be taken seriously, but we do not have to live in fear. The way we stop the harassment and torment is to deal with the root issues that are plaguing us and allow Jesus to come and set us free from the hurt and trauma.

God sends His angels to carry out His will upon the earth. We can pray and ask God to send His angels to our aid and help us during times of spiritual warfare. We don’t talk or develop a relationship with angels, but we do ask God to send His angels to help us.

Non-believers can be possessed by demons today just as they were in the Bible. Not all unbelievers are possessed by demons.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think you may need to anoint your home with oil?
2. What hinders you from praying for people to be healed?
3. What did you learn about praying for your family?

Section V: The Weapon of Prayer

Group Questions (GQs)

1. Begin group time by sharing something “happy” in your life and something “crappy” in your life. We call this Happy & Crappy.
2. Look over the Questions for Reflection in Chapter 10. What is one question that you would like to discuss as a group? (*Vote as a group and go for it! If it's a tie, discuss them both.*)
3. What stories from the Bible come to mind of God speaking to his people?
4. Share a story from your life when you felt that God was speaking to you.
5. Which WARNING about hearing from God in Chapter 11 did you like the most? Why?
6. In Chapter 12, which prayer do you need to add to your arsenal of weapons?
7. End by praying for each other. Use anointing oil if appropriate.

Section VI: Bonus Weapons

Chapter 16: The Secret Place: Where You Prepare for the Battle.

Big Idea: You can build a special place where you spiritually dwell with Jesus so He can teach you His ways.

Can you picture a time in the future where Christians all over the world are hunted down, locked up, and go into hiding? Christians are actually being persecuted and martyred in parts of the world right now. It's not too far-fetched to imagine that scenario happening in the USA if we don't see a big revival. What would you do if you have no church, no access to a Bible, or even locked up in prison? How would you grow spiritually?

The answer is: You would go to a secret place with just you and Jesus! In that special place with Jesus, the Holy Spirit would remind you of everything Jesus has already taught you. You would sing songs of worship there. You would quote Scripture. You would ask Jesus how to respond to your prison guards, how to persevere during the suffering, and how to live out the fruit of the Spirit for the other prisoners to see.

If that's what we would do during imprisonment, why not live that way now? What does the Bible say about this secret place with Jesus that we can build right now for the battles ahead?

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." ³ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. ⁴ He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. ⁵ You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Psalm 91:1-7 (NKJV)

You can dwell in the secret place with the Most High. You can take refuge in Him. You can trust Him. God can deliver you. You don't have to live in fear during the day or night because He is with you. You don't have to worry about death because you have been given eternal life. What other promises are given to us as we dwell in this secret place with Jesus our God!

Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, ¹⁰ No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; ¹¹ For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. ¹² In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone. ¹³ You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. ¹⁴ "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. ¹⁵ He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation." Psalm 91:8-16 (NKJV)

Because you dwell with Jesus and have set your love upon Him, He will deliver you and set you on high. You will be able to speak to Jesus and He will answer you. Even if you find yourself in prison, hospital bed, or a hangman's noose, Jesus will be with you in trouble. He will deliver you in this life or for all eternity, and he will honor you. You will be satisfied with Jesus all your life on earth and throughout all eternity because you have experienced salvation in Jesus.

You have an earthly dwelling. I am asking you to build a spiritual dwelling place with Jesus that you can go at any moment, anywhere in the world, and no one will be able to stop you. Here are the blueprints:

The Blueprints to Your Secret Place with Jesus

1. It all begins with a relationship with Jesus. Give Him control of your life as Savior and Lord.
2. Construct a dwelling place with Jesus that is your refuge. It is a place for you to escape this sinful world with all its problems. This is a spiritual place. It's not a physical place that you can touch or visit. You may have actually been to this place on earth, but you must be able to immediately go to your secret dwelling place with Jesus at any moment. You should be able to close your eyes, and you are instantly there with Jesus.
3. The goal of life is for you to have a relationship with God and one another. Your favorite places are where you meet with your friends and family. Now it's time for you to have a spiritual place to meet with the spiritual person of Jesus. What do you think people do in their prayer closets? They meet with Jesus. Go meet with Jesus in a place that is special to you and Him. No one can ever take this place away from you. You can go there anytime.
4. Don't be weird! I know it may seem weird, but don't make it weird. It only becomes weird when you tell other people about it. So, don't tell them. Just go meet with Jesus and keep it private (a secret place).

My Secret Place with Jesus:

I have never described to anyone (not even my wife) about my secret place with the Lord, but I think it is important to tell you. You really need this weapon. You need this place more than you think. Jesus has so much to personally and privately tell you.

I quiet my mind. I normally close my eyes, and I see myself there. Normally it's dark. (I like the darkness, and I am not afraid.) Lightning is often flashing all around, and it's completely peaceful, and I am at rest. Jesus is there. I speak with Him. (People call it prayer, but I call it a conversation with Jesus.) I complain to Jesus. I share my fears, my hurts, and doubts. I ask Him to show me what to do in specific situations. I ask Him how to respond to people. I forgive people there. I cry. I rejoice. I laugh. I ask Him to heal people. Save certain people. I can quickly go there, and I can quickly leave. I don't go there every day. I sometimes go weeks without being there. I am sometimes afraid to be with Jesus there because He expects a lot, and I would rather be lazy and ignorant of the plans that He has for me because I am selfish. All the major decisions in my life over the last 10 years have been made in this place with Jesus. I typically tell Jesus "No" when He asks me to do something hard or that has never been done. Eventually, I say "Yes." I don't ever feel condemned or ashamed. I get convicted of things in my life. I give over areas of my life to Jesus. He exposes my sin and wrong motives. I talk. I listen. I sometimes just sit with Jesus and look at a sunset or my kids playing in an old memory. I think of Jesus as a Savior, Teacher, and Friend. When I see Jesus for the first time in heaven, I hope I am not surprised because we have met so many times before on earth.

Is Building a Secret Place Biblical or Just an Active Imagination?

The Apostle John was exiled to an island called Patmos because of His testimony of Jesus. How would you describe where John was physically and spiritually in this passage?

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."
Revelation 1:9-11 (NKJV)

I believe John was with Jesus spiritually (and physically). I would describe this as John's secret place with Jesus. He was an exiled prisoner from society but not from Jesus. If one of the greatest fathers of our faith was

with Jesus spiritually, we need to be as well. Jesus showed up and gave John his battle instructions for the seven churches in Asia. It's time for you to build a special place where you spiritually dwell with Jesus so He can teach you His ways. What is stopping you? Go for it. Jesus is waiting to meet with you.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How would you describe what it practically means to have a relationship with Jesus?
2. What are some truths that stand out to you from Psalm 91?
3. Do you think you will have a secret place with Jesus? What fears do you have about it?

Section VI: Bonus Weapons

Chapter 17: Your Battle Buddies

Big Idea: God will use His people to help you accomplish greater things.

My family and I were in Israel five years ago. My son, Corban, was baptized near the place where the disciples hauled in a huge miraculous catch of fish in the Sea of Galilee. It was on that trip that God started planting an idea in my mind of purchasing a home in Israel that StoneWater could use as a place of ministry. More than a year went by, but I continued to privately tell my wife all the ways we could use a home in Israel to change people's lives. We finally made the decision to tell other people about this vision that God had given us. I am not sure why we were surprised, but the very first group we shared it with God showed up in a big way. Some of our friends who attended StoneWater during our days at the movie theater took us to dinner. We shared in greater detail how a home in Israel would benefit our people and the people in Israel. The next week, we received a check made out to StoneWater Church for \$150,000, and it was designated to our Israel Ministry Center. On September 15, 2022 StoneWater Church received the most incredible home at the Sea of Galilee. It has 8 bedrooms, 5.5 bathrooms, and has the most incredible view of the lake from the 3rd story balcony. We have a partnership with the owners of this home so that StoneWater Church can use their home as a place of ministry. I cannot wait for you to be in Israel to see our church's Israel Ministry Center Home.

Many people gave to our Israel Ministry Center. Each one of them was a huge encouragement. They all continue to propel us to keep sharing the vision and praying for God to do something miraculous. They did, and God did. Everyone wins. The owners of the home in Israel have blessed us, and we are blessing them. God is so good!

God uses His people to help us accomplish greater things than we could ever do on our own. Who has God used in your life? Here are three life lessons that I hope you will add to the weapons that God has given you. One of God's greatest gifts to us is His people.

1. God's people will spur you on to greater things.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

Both of my grandfathers were farmers and ranchers. They raised cattle and farmed peanuts and grain. Pa Beck had a horse named Goldie. She was a huge Palomino horse (mainly huge to me because I was about 5 years old). She was super gentle, and I never saw Pa ride her with spurs. I have always thought spurs were for disobedient and hard-headed horses, but real horse people might tell us differently. When I think of "spurring one another on toward love and good deeds," I think of hard-headed people needing a good pop to straighten up or to giddy up and go. We all need people in our lives who will give us a hug when we need to be comforted or a kick in the pants when we need to get going or stop going the wrong way.

God uses His people in our lives to get us on the right track. Think back to how God has used people like that throughout your life. Praise God for dads, grandmas, best friends, and coaches. God used those people and many more to spur us on to greater things and stop us from doing the wrong things. Who is doing that in your life now? Who are you spurring on?

2. God's people will sharpen you so you can be more effective.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17 (NASB)

When my boys graduated high school, I gave them a special gift. Every man needs a knife. The best knives are the ones that are made by a professional who forges them in fire. We have some super talented men in our

church that have their own forges. These guys take a rugged piece of metal and turn it into a beautiful masterpiece. Sparks are flying. Molten hot metal is beaten into submission and forms into an incredible work of art and tool. These guys are taking something dull and safe and forging into something sharp and dangerous. What about you? Are you dull and safe? Or are you sharp and dangerous in the hands of God? God wants to forge you into someone who is a danger to the kingdom of Darkness. He wants to move you from being dull and not useful to someone who can cut through the lies of deception and know the truth. God uses people to sharpen you so you can be more effective in His Kingdom. Who is sharpening you? Who are you sharpening?

3. God's people will speak truth in your life and expose lies you have believed.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:14-15 (NIV)

I can't help it. I sit there and try to mind my own business. I tell myself, "Don't do it! Just let it go." I have done this many times through the years, and I know that it will be awkward for everyone in the room, but if I don't say something, no one will. They continue to speak lies to the small or large group I am in, and I finally blurt out, "That's not true!" Everything goes quiet. The pin drops, and everyone hears it loud and clear. The stunned look on the person's face says it all. It's like they say, "How dare you! Who do you think you are? What a jerk." Before I know it, I am telling them why what they are saying is a lie from the pit of hell and what the Bible says about it. I try to do it out of love, but it normally just comes across as mean because most people are not used to someone pointing out their lies. Yes, we do it on social media all the time from the comforts of our home. But most people would never say those things to someone in person. Why not? Because we would rather keep the peace than to drop a truth bomb on someone.

The best way to help someone discover the truth is to first have a relationship with them. In my above examples, I did not have a relationship with the person. That's why it ended badly sometimes. But pointing out truth and lies to a friend always ends so much better because of the trust that has been built through the years. Think back to friends who have helped you discern the truth when you were believing lies. If you truly loved one another, you received their help. God uses people in our lives to speak truth into our lives. God's people also expose the lies that we have fallen into. Who are the people that you trust to speak truth into your life? Who did God give you to point out lies?

Questions for Reflection:

1. How has someone spurred you on to do greater things for God?
2. Explain a time when someone sharpened you in your walk with God.
3. Who are the people that God has given you to speak truth and dispel lies?

Section VI: Bonus Weapons

Chapter 18: A Weapon that Heals

Big Idea: God uses music to touch us in the deepest places of our pain.

Jeremy and I had prayed, planned, and were prepared to move in just a few months to start StoneWater Church in 2005. Carson, my son, was only two years old. A few days after Christmas, my wife Lisa knew something was wrong, but we just thought his swollen tonsils needed to be removed and all would be well. We were in a clinic in Brownwood, TX when the doctor came in with a chair. He sat down and shared with us the worst news of our life: that Carson had cancer. A helicopter was on the way and would take him to Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth. We were confused, heartbroken, and afraid. His organs were shutting down, and we almost lost him in the ICU. Three years of chemotherapy followed. A long story short, Carson married his high school sweetheart on June 11, 2022. Hallelujah!

I cannot remember how long it was, but I am guessing that I did not sing one worship song for six months after Carson was diagnosed with cancer. Instead of words, all I could give was tears. Tears would just stream down my face. I was mad at God. At the same time, I was praising God that Carson was alive. I was afraid that Carson would still not survive. I was depending on God, yet I was far from God. God was near to me because I could see and feel Him, but I was questioning why God would allow this to happen to my son. I stopped praying. I figured that God was going to do whatever He wanted whether I prayed or not. What was the point? I needed God to heal my hurts, but I was not willing to move toward God.

The way God began to heal me was through worship music. I could not escape His presence, and I honestly did not want to. I was hurt and needed help. Secular music made me feel worse and only brought up that I had problems. Worship music provided the answer to my biggest need. I needed God to heal my hurt. His music touched me on a deep spiritual level, and I knew that God was right next to me. The tears were me getting rid of my anger, chaos, and feeling like God abandoned us. The music replaced anger with appreciation. Worship brought peace during chaos. I cried out abandonment and words of worship filled me with the truth that God was right there with us the entire time.

Worship is a weapon that brings healing. This world is broken. We needed a Savior and God gave us exactly Who we needed, King Jesus!

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁸ The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:17-18 (NIV)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. ² Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. ³ Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵ For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100 (NIV)

Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. ² Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. ³ He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. ⁴ He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. ⁵ He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! Psalm 103:1-5 (NLT)

Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! ² The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. ³ He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. ⁴ He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. ⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. ⁶ The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. ⁷ Sing

to the Lord with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp. Psalm 147:1-7 (NLT)

We are at war, and sometimes in the midst of war, we get wounded. King Jesus has provided many ways to bring healing, and one of them is worship music. We see this with David playing for King Saul in the Old Testament, and we can see it today in our lives.

We live and worship our King Jesus. As we worship him, he often brings us everything we need at that time, including our healing.

Throughout this study, we have looked with depth into the spiritual war that we find ourselves in as believers. We learned about our King, his enemy, and how to fight with strength in this life. We have added to our arsenal of weapons. Now, it's time to fight. Over the last few years, the weaknesses of the American church have been revealed through hardship. Our hope is that through this study, we as a church are maturing in our faith so that we are prepared for whatever comes next. You now have weapons to engage and to win in warfare for your King. Go. Fight. Win!

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have there been times in your life where you did not want to sing to God?
2. How can we use worship as a weapon?
3. Describe how God has used worship music in your life to bring healing.

Section VI: Bonus Weapons

Group Questions (GQs)

1. What is one thing that surprised you about this group (it was a bonus that you didn't see coming)?
2. Have you ever thought about the weapon of a secret place? How would you describe a secret place to someone from chapter 16? How do you make it not weird?
3. Describe a time when someone spurred you on towards greater works and a time that someone sharpened you.
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to confront lies that other people are saying and believing? Describe a situation where someone in your life is believing a lie.
5. What are some practical suggestions that you have for speaking truth and exposing lies?
6. How have you seen worship used as a weapon for King Jesus in your life?
7. End by taking time to share your spiritual biggest takeaway from this group over the last 6 weeks.

Bonus Question:

Who is ready to re-enlist for this group? The next group launch is January 29, 2023.

