



STANDING FIRM:

ARMING YOURSELF IN
GOD'S MIGHTY POWER

A CALL TO ARMS

Why would you want to study about the Armor of God? Maybe you don't want to be in "the battle". Maybe you don't think you need to be. Maybe you think that "the battle" is just for super-holy people who want to save the world. Maybe all you want to do is to get through the day, the week, the month, and the year. Maybe you have your hands full with your own life situation. Or maybe everything seems to be going just fine for you. Here are some things to consider: Do you ever feel afraid? Afraid about the future, afraid for the people you love, afraid about finances, afraid about your health or afraid about the way the world is becoming? Do you ever feel discouraged, depressed, confused, obsessed, full of worries, condemned, pushed, hopeless, anxious or rushed? None of these conditions come from God. If you have experience with any of these conditions, and chances are that you may have had, then learning how to stand firm in God's mighty power can be of great benefit to you and your family.

Chances are also good that you're doing much more than you realize when it comes to fighting the battle. By engaging in prayer and study of the Word, participation at Mass and in the Sacraments of the Church, and connecting to a dynamic faith community, you're well on your way to a solid stance against the enemy.

The purpose of this study is to help you recognize the areas where you can become more intentional in holding your ground and to discover new ways of engaging in the spiritual battle. There is nothing new about this battle—we're all in it. But becoming aware and informed is a weapon to help you live out your purpose in life.

Within this study are several elements designed to help move your understanding of arming yourself in God's mighty power.... from your mind to your heart:

- *A weekly calendar grid designed to help you plan and time block your study time, including a "habits and practices" tracker.*
- *A daily question prompt for each lesson to help integrate what you're learning into your everyday life.*
- *A call to creativity through various prayer experience invitations.*
- *"Abba time": the most vital element of this study - and your transformation.*



GETTING READY

Read Romans 13:11-14 and write Romans 13:12 below:

Read Ephesians 6:10 -19 and list the six pieces of the Armor of God.

Who or what is our battle/struggle with? (Ephesians 6:12)

What does, “put on the armor of God” mean to you?

Ephesians 6:11 doesn't say put on the armor of God *just in case* there will be tactics from Satan. We are told to put on God's armor so that we will be able to stand firm against the schemes/tactics of Satan. We are told, quite clearly what our struggles will be; they will be against a presence that we cannot see, not flesh and blood, but with the rulers of darkness, with evil spirits. Our daily struggles can be relentless and can gain a stronghold that we cannot handle on our own. Some of those struggles are: pride, gluttony, lust, sloth, anger, envy, greed, addictions, self-doubt, comparison, fear, anxiety, and self-loathing. The list goes on and on.

Can you relate to any of the struggles listed above? Explain.

What do you hope to gain from this study?



THE BATTLE IS REAL

Can't a case against evil be made without making recourse to demons, ghosts, and malicious human spirits? Yes, a very convincing case can be made on the basis of natural law to do good and avoid evil, to pursue virtue, and avoid vice for the sake of oneself, others, culture, and the world. Yet strong as the natural law and natural virtue case may be, it is only a small part of the story. We are living not only in the physical world, but also within a supernatural struggle between good and evil which has effects on the human soul or spirit beyond the physical universe and throughout eternity. It is this dimension of evil—the dimension with which Jesus was urgently concerned—precisely because it is frequently ignored or overlooked, while having transcendent and eternal consequences. If we are open to the whole story—the transcendent and eternal story—then we will not be able to escape the supernatural dimension of good and evil—angels and demons, beneficent and malevolent human spirits, and the supernatural struggle between good and evil. Why is the whole story so important? As every prudent person knows, “forewarned is forearmed.” If there really is a calculating, dangerous, dark, destructive and vicious evil force who intends us harm—even eternal harm—then we should want to know about it. If a terrorist is living in our neighborhood, wouldn't we want to swallow the bitter pill of knowing this fact so that we could do something about it or would we rather pretend that he is not there until he goes away? The devil, like the terrorist, does not go away if we ignore him. Instead, he increases his influence, domain, destructiveness, and malevolent intent to seduce and goad “the unaware” into his eternal darkness. Putting our hands in front of our eyes and insisting, “You can't see me!” is a highly ineffective strategy for contending with a demon of remarkable intelligence and cruelty.

So what kind of strategy is effective? One that recognizes the presence of spiritual evil, how it works, and most importantly, who and what prevents it from working. Though all the world's religions have rites and prayers to ward off and exorcise demons, Christianity, and particularly the Catholic Church, has the most extensive, nuanced, and deep articulation of the sources of evil, its workings, and the ways to protect ourselves from it. It is not based on magical incantations and practices, which fall prey to the very evil it is trying to avoid—but rather is based on the teachings, prayers, and redemptive actions of Jesus Christ and faith in Him. Jesus definitively defeated evil which means that all free agents who trust and try to follow Him can never be ultimately subjugated by evil. Jesus will always have the last salvific word. If we throw ourselves upon His mercy while trying to follow His “way,” His Holy Spirit will guide us to the heavenly kingdom He has prepared for us with His Father.

Nevertheless, spiritual evil can still tempt us, deceive us, attack us and try to seduce us away from God into its lair of emptiness, coldness, darkness, and loneliness. To be sure, it disguises its dark reality with desirable objects which appear to be sources of true happiness, power, dominion, egocentricity, and all Seven Deadly Sins, but eventually it will reveal glimpses of the darkness into which it is leading.

Robert Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D., Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil through Virtue and Prayer, The Reality of Spiritual Evil.

CONSIDER

Have you given much thought to the spiritual battle? Do you have any reservations about arming yourself in God's mighty power? Why or why not? Journal about any thoughts you have in this regard.



WHAT IS TRUTH?

Fr. Spitzer tells us:

The truth is Jesus Christ, His love, and the expression of His love as manifest in the Beatitudes. The beatitudes reveal the heart of Jesus—that is, they are His constant statement of what love is. The Hebrew culture did not make a separation between the head and the heart like we do. When Jesus is talking about truth (in reference to Ephesians 6:14), he is talking about the meaning or essence of life, which is unconditional love.

Personal interview with Fr. Spitzer, April 20, 2018.

Do you agree that the true essence of life includes the call to unconditional love? Why or not not? If so, how might that change the way that you live, or your outlook on life?

Read and write: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

If you can imagine the “belt of truth” as unconditional love, how would you see that flowing into all areas of your life?

Notes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Old Testament attests that God is the source of all truth. His Word is truth. His Law is truth. His “faithfulness endures to all generations.” Since God is “true”, the members of his people are called to live in the truth. CCC 2465

In Jesus Christ, the whole of God’s truth has been made manifest. “Full of grace and truth”, he came as the “light of the world”. He is the Truth. “Whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness”. The disciple of Jesus continues in his word so as to know “the truth (that) will make you free” and that sanctifies. To follow Jesus is to live in “the Spirit of truth”, whom the Father sends in his name and who leads “into all truth”. To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth: “let what you say be simply ‘yes or no.’” CCC 2466

THE VINE - A PRAYER EXPERIENCE

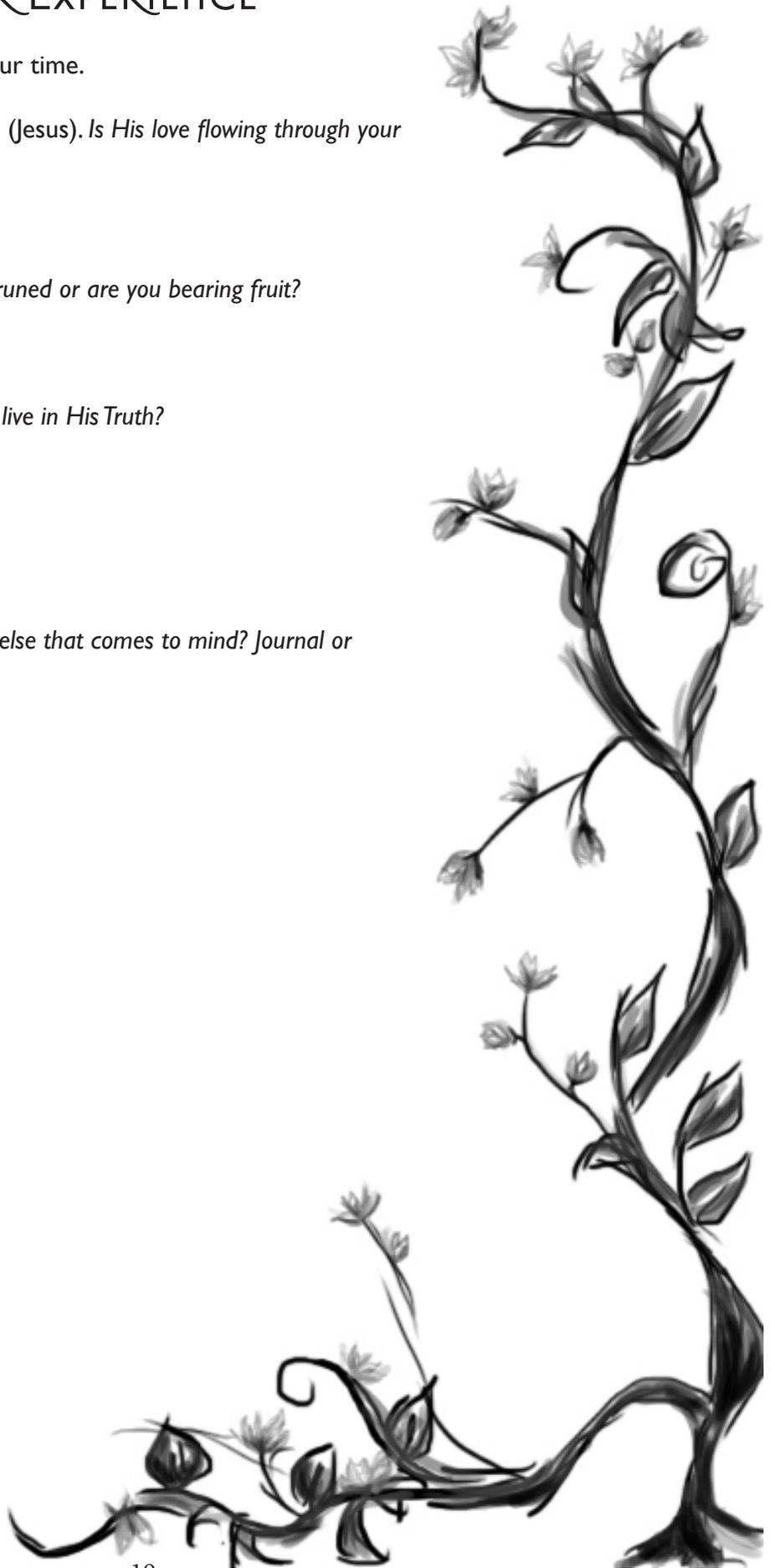
Prayerfully read John 15:1-11, taking your time.

Imagine yourself connected to the vine (Jesus). *Is His love flowing through your branches?*

At this season of your life are you being pruned or are you bearing fruit?

How does being part of the vine help you live in His Truth?

Re-read John 15: 1-11. *Is there anything else that comes to mind? Journal or draw about this.*





5 FAITH AND ARROWS

Faith is a shield or barrier between us and evil. It includes knowledge of God and confident trust in Him. A firm trust in God renders powerless the doubts and accusations Satan hurls at us.

Fr. Spitzer explains:

Faith has three layers. The first layer is the intellectual layer—basically it's the belief in the creed. The second layer asks the questions that are highlighted throughout St. John's gospel: "Do you know the heart of Jesus enough to hope for salvation? Do you hope in the unconditional love of God?" The third layer of faith is a conviction to trust more deeply in the Lord and to ask Him to teach us His ways. This ultimately comes down to surrender. You can't really surrender without these layers of faith.

Personal interview with Fr. Spitzer, April 20, 2018.

Is there anything in your life that is calling for a deeper surrender? Write about this.

*According to the following scriptures, how do you "pick up" the shield of faith?
Read, rewrite and respond:*

Psalm 91:4b

I John 5:4-5

Psalm 18:35

I Corinthians 15:1-2

Wisdom from St. Ignatius of Loyola

The strategy of our Adversary can be compared to the tactics of a commander intent upon seizing and plundering the position he desires. The leader of an army will encamp, explore fortifications and defenses of the fortress, and attack at the weakest point. In the same way, the Adversary of our human nature examines from every side all our virtues: theological, cardinal, and moral. Wherever he discovers the defenses of eternal salvation to be the weakest and most lacking, he attacks and tries to take us by storm.

St. Ignatius composed the following prayer to help aid us into a deep surrender. *Set aside some time this week to prayerfully ponder his words and respond from your heart.*

SUSCIPE PRAYER:

Take, LORD, and receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding
and my entire will;
all that I have
and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
All is yours;
do with it as you will.
Give me only your love
and all your grace,
That is enough for me.
St. Ignatius of Loyola

