

LIFE IS WAR

BY GREG SIDDERS

L*ife Is Beautiful* is a 1998 film that I waited until 2013 to watch. Why the 15-year delay? Because it's a movie about the Holocaust, and I stopped watching movies about the Holocaust after I saw *Schindler's List*. In fact, I have done my best to avoid every reminder of the Holocaust. Twice I have had the opportunity to visit the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., and twice I have declined. I'm not trying to pretend it never happened, but I admit I can hardly bear to think about it. It's just too tragic, too evil, for me to stomach.

But I finally worked up the courage to watch *Life is Beautiful*, and, as it turns out, it's a movie for people just like me, because it's about a father who shields his son from the horror of the Holocaust despite the fact that both of them have to live through it. When their family is taken to a concentration camp, the father convinces his boy that it's just a game. He tells the 5-year-old that he can earn points by hiding from the Nazi guards, and that if he cries or begs for his mother or says that he is hungry, he will lose points, or worse, be disqualified. The first family to score 1,000 points wins a real tank. The father loves his son too much to let him face harsh reality, so he creates for him a happier fantasy.

What would you say if I told you that, right now, you are living in a war zone? If you have been as oblivious to it as the boy in *Life is Beautiful*, join the club. Most people don't have a clue. And the reason why is because it is not a military conflict; it is a spiritual one. It's an invisible war

between the kingdom of light and the dominion of darkness.

I know those words sounds like fantasy, like something out of *Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and so maybe you think I'm speaking allegorically—that all I'm really saying is that sometimes life is not beautiful. And that would probably resonate with you, because you have fought your share of “battles”, haven't you?

Maybe they have been internal, for the most part. You've struggled with guilt, or shame, or anxiety, or depression, or fear. In fact, the battle may be raging right now—despite therapy, despite medication, despite hospitalization. You're in the fight of your life, but almost nobody knows it because it's happening inside of you.

Or you have battled physical illness. You've been diagnosed with a serious, maybe even a terminal, disease—or something's going on in your body that has not been diagnosed. Doctors tell you there's nothing wrong with you, but the pain tells you there is. You're in a tunnel that may or may not have a light at the end of it.

You may be at the boiling point of a relational conflict, perhaps with someone you thought you would always be close to. Or you are grieving the end of a valued relationship—a divorce, a betrayal. Even if it happened a long time ago, you are still scarred, and still beating back bitterness.

And then there is the struggle to do what you know is right. You want to obey God in some area of your life that you've never been able to conquer. The

temptation to sin is constant, and so is the temptation to quit. Or you want to serve God in some way, but you've hit obstacle after obstacle that has kept you from doing what you know he wants you to do. Or you found truth in Christ and in the Bible, but doubt has been creeping in. You wonder if you've been duped, and you're starting to flirt with ideas that once seemed downright dangerous.

But, hey, that's just life, right?

No, that's war.

It doesn't necessarily feel like war, because what you are experiencing is happening in the physical realm—but the reason it is happening is because of what is going on in the spiritual realm. You are experiencing the visible results of an invisible battle.

The Bible talks about it from beginning to end, but nowhere more matter-of-factly than in Ephesians 6.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

—Ephesians 6:12

So there are evil forces in the heavenly realms that oppose those of us who live in the earthly realm. Who are they, and what are they doing in heaven?

Well, first, you need to understand that “the heavenly realms” include more than heaven, as we think of it. Heaven is the place where God and his angels live, but the heavenly realms are where all non-physical spirit beings, both holy and evil, live. We call the holy ones *angels* and the evil ones *demons*. At one time they were all holy angels, but sometime before God created human beings, there was a mutiny

in the heavenly realms. A very powerful angel, identified in the Bible as Satan, led a rebellion against God, and a third of the angels joined forces with him.

So, since before the human race even existed, there has been a cosmic conflict going on. And when God created human beings to bear His image, and to be members of His family and citizens of His kingdom, Satan and his evil army made it their mission to destroy that image, to break up that family, and to infiltrate that kingdom.

They scored their first victory when Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve to sin, and to suffer the consequences of that sin, which was death. Demonic forces have been doing the very same thing to all human beings ever since, so successfully that Jesus called Satan “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and the apostle John wrote that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

He's doing everything in his power to keep it that way. He is doing it by enticing and, in some cases, even empowering people to sin. He is doing it by tormenting people physically and emotionally. He is doing it by controlling people through fear. He is doing it by blinding people to who Jesus is, and by confusing or distracting them so that they can't understand and embrace the simple message that “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). That's not a confusing statement, and yet how many people do you know who scratch their heads or yawn when they hear it? Why? Because the evil one comes and snatches away that seed of truth that was sown in their heart.

But this war against the kingdom of God is doomed to failure, because a

counter-offensive has been launched by God Himself! 1 John 3:8 says that “the reason the Son of God appeared”—the reason that He came from the heavenly realms into the earthly realm—“was to destroy the devil’s work.” Acts 10:38 says that Jesus “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.” And then, according to Colossians 2:15, Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

The decisive battle in the war between the kingdom of light and the dominion of darkness took place on the cross, and Jesus won. Now he is on his throne in heaven leading a progressive take-over of the world, one defector at a time. And there is a day, already circled on God’s calendar, when Jesus will come back to earth and crush Satan under our feet (Romans 16:20; Revelation 20:3). The only reason he hasn’t returned yet is because he wants to rescue more people from Satan’s clutches before he annihilates his kingdom.

Satan knows his time is short, and because of that, he is filled with fury (Revelation 12:12). He is more fiercely determined than ever to keep people out of God’s kingdom. And—brace yourself—*his primary strategy for minimizing defections is to neutralize Christians*, because we’re the ones Jesus has deployed to help others escape from the devil’s death camp.

You are on Satan’s “Most Wanted” list! He is doing everything he can right now to make you a casualty. He is constantly enticing you to sin, which is why the apostle Matthew called him *the tempter* (Matthew 4:1). When you do sin, he tries to paralyze you with guilt, which is why the apostle John called him *the accuser* (Revelation 12:10). He is trying to make you doubt or misinterpret Scripture, which

is why Jesus called him *the father of lies* (John 8:44). He may be attacking your body mercilessly, which is one of the reasons why Christ and the apostles so often called him *the evil one*. He is trying to put walls up between you and other Christians, and he is hindering every effort you make to share the good news with others. No wonder the apostle Peter called him our *adversary* (1 Peter 5:8). And, although it is a futile effort, the devil is also relentlessly pressuring you to abandon Christ and return to his tyranny.

That’s why life is hard. It’s because you are in the middle of a world war. That’s not hyperbole. It’s reality.

So the question is, how can you go toe-to-toe with demons whose strength and skill are far superior to yours? The short answer is in Ephesians 6:10: “...Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Don’t rely on your own strength, the apostle Paul says. Let God empower you.

Notice the three muscular words Paul uses. Strong. Mighty. Power. Those are the same three words that he used back in chapter 1 of Ephesians, where he said that the power of God that is available to those who believe in Jesus is incomparably great; in fact, it is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and lifted Him far above all other spiritual authorities, including every demon. That’s the power that is available to you when you engage in spiritual battle!

But how do you get that power?

You wear it.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

—Ephesians 6:11

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

—Ephesians 6:13

What's the goal? It's to stay standing! Paul says that once in verse 11 and twice in verse 13. And it's the first word in verse 14: "Stand"! So wear the armor, and you won't go down. When Jesus arrives on the body-littered battlefield of this planet to put an end to the war, you will be one of soldiers still standing—if you wear the protection he has provided.

There are six pieces of armor in verse 14-17. Let's get familiar with each of them.

I. THE BELT OF TRUTH.

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist..." (Ephesians 6:14). Why did first-century soldiers need a belt? It's because they wore a tunic—a long, loose-fitting robe. When it was time to fight, they needed to be unrestricted. The belt would pull the tunic close to the body and provide a place to tuck in the extra material that typically covered their legs. It helped them to be more mobile.

Paul uses the word picture of a belt to represent truth. Why is truth so important in battle? Because our enemy's primary weapon is falsehood. Jesus said in John 8:44 that "when [the devil] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Satan is a lying ventriloquist. He tries to deceive us—through false spiritual teachers, through media brainwashing, through ungodly friends and even through our own thoughts.

Have you ever said anything like this to yourself? *This time, I know I can't be forgiven. Or, If God really loved me, He would answer my prayer. Or, Why shouldn't we live together?* Or,

There's got to be more than one way to God. Or, Maybe the Bible isn't really God's word. Guess where those thoughts came from? They came from the father of lies.

Something I've struggled with from time to time since becoming a Christian is the fear of death—which doesn't make sense, because I know I'm going to live forever. But, before I was a Christian, I was terrified of death, so Satan knows that's an area of vulnerability in my life. And the way I have learned to protect myself from the irrational but paralyzing lies Satan whispers in my mind is to recite specific passages of Scripture that tell me the truth:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

—John 11:25-26

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

—Hebrews 2:14-15

Passages like those protect me from the lies of Satan. They form a belt of truth that helps me stay on my feet when the father of lies tries to take me out.

2. THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Have you ever been hounded with feelings of guilt? Have you ever thought anything like this? *I'm such a sinner. I'm so worthless. God must be disgusted with me. I'm probably not even a Christian, because a true Christian would never do something like that.*

Whose voice is that? Yours? No. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called "the

accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night....” When you experience crippling feelings of condemnation that remain even after you confess your sins, believe me, you’re under spiritual attack. And the resource God has given you to protect you from those demonic accusations is “the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14)—not your own righteousness, but the righteousness that has been given to you as a gift because you believe in Jesus.

Listen, you’ll never conquer feelings of condemnation by appealing to your own obedience (as important as obedience is) because all Satan needs to sideline you is one sin. Tell me you have never fixated on a single, out-of-character failure. The only way to silence the devil’s accusations is by covering yourself with the righteousness of Christ. Romans 3:22 says that “righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

So when Satan accuses you, and tries to bury you with guilt, don’t take inventory of your progress in righteousness. Wear your breastplate (or, as the New Living Translation puts it, your body armor), which is the perfect righteousness of Christ. That’s how to win the battle against guilt.

3. THE FOOTWEAR OF THE GOSPEL.

Your feet need to be “fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel (good news) of peace,” Paul says in Ephesians 6:15. That makes me think of Romans 10:15, where he quotes the Old Testament passage that says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Is Paul saying that we advance against the dominion of darkness every time we help someone cross the

border into the kingdom of light by sharing the gospel with them?

I don’t think so (although that is true!) because, remember, Paul is talking about how to stand firm in the face of a demonic attack. That’s what a soldier’s footwear did; it gave him firm footing. And the gospel of peace gives us firm footing. The gospel, the good news, is that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s what Romans 5:1 says. So any time you find yourself slipping into the fear that you are at odds with God, all you have to do is to dig your cleats into the gospel.

And it’s called the gospel of peace because Jesus mediated, not only peace between us and God, but also peace between us and other people. Ephesians 1:14 says to us when we are tempted to take sides with one group of Christians against another that “[Jesus] is our peace,” that he died to bring us together. So whenever the devil tries to drive a wedge between you and another Christian, or to withhold forgiveness from them—which he is constantly trying to do, by the way, because he knows the power of unity and love (John 13:35; 17:23)—you can respond to that temptation by saying, “No, I will not hold a grudge against that person, I will not separate from that group, because Jesus died to make us one. His gospel is a gospel of peace. Lord, strengthen me to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.” That kind of resistance to the devil will make him flee.

4. THE SHIELD OF FAITH.

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). What a great word picture! The shield that Paul is talking

about is not a little round one, but a huge rectangular one—4 ½ feet high, 2 ½ feet wide, covered with leather that has been dipped in water so that when a flaming arrow hits it, the fire goes out. You can protect your whole body with a shield like that.

What is it that gives us that kind of protection against the ruthless attacks of our adversary? Faith. What does faith do? It believes what God has said.

The devil's oldest scheme is to tempt us to doubt or distrust God's word. Way back in Genesis 3, he did exactly that to Eve.

He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

—Genesis 3:1-5

In other words, "You don't really believe that stuff, do you?"

Faith says, "Yes!"—even when what God says goes against everything we feel. You are never more vulnerable than when your emotions eclipse your convictions. When I was a new Christian someone showed me a picture of a train with a *fact* engine, a *faith* boxcar, and a *feeling* caboose. The point was simple: Hitching our faith to feelings is like trying to pull a train by the caboose. No, we put our *faith* in the *facts* that are presented to us in Scripture, and our feelings follow—sometimes. Sometimes there's a caboose, and

sometimes there isn't. But what keeps the train going forward is the engine. The facts. The truth. God's word. Get the order reversed, and you are vulnerable, because the devil rides in the caboose.

5. THE HELMET OF SALVATION.

"Take the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17). What does that mean? It means to protect your mind with what Scripture says about how certain you can be that you're going to heaven.

There is nothing more paralyzing than the fear that you have lost your salvation. Some Christians never experience that terror, but others never escape it. You may be one who is convinced you have committed the unpardonable sin. I could tell you, on the basis of God's Word, that if you think you have, you haven't—but you will deflect my encouragement, because you have all these little scraps of Scripture that Satan has used to create a collage of condemnation in your mind.

You do know that he is a Scripture-twister, don't you? He is a master at lifting portions of passages out of their context and making a looping soundtrack out of them to create grooves of guilt in your mind that keep you in your head and off the front lines.

The helmet of salvation is your way of escape. You need to find every passage in the Bible that assures you of the security of your salvation. Here are a few to get you started:

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

—2 Corinthians 1:21-22

“I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

—John 10:28-30

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

—1 John 5:11-13

That’s the truth. It’s a helmet that can protect your mind from paralyzing demonic lies.

6. THE SWORD OF THE WORD OF GOD.

“Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). What is the “word of God”? The Bible? No. Well, yes, but not the whole Bible. The term that Paul uses for “word” means *an appropriately spoken word*. To use the sword of the Spirit means to *speak* a *specific* word of God that is appropriate for the occasion. It’s the same Greek word that is used in Hebrews 4:12, which says that “the word of God is alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword.”

When we respond to demonic attacks with the right words of Scripture, we win the battle. So, for example, if you are being so severely tempted to sin that you think we don’t have the strength to say no, you can quote 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Or when you are vulnerable to believing that the bad things that are happening to you disprove God’s love or his power, you can speak out loud Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Or when you are tempted to think that it’s OK for you to fly solo as a Christian, you can quote Hebrews 10:25, which says: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”

This is what it means to use the sword of the Spirit. It means to answer the lies or the temptations of Satan with a specific passage of Scripture.

That’s exactly what Jesus did when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Three times Satan tempted Him, and three times Jesus responded by saying, “It is written,” and then quoting Scripture, out loud. That’s how to use the sword of the Spirit.

Let’s review. There are six different pieces of spiritual armor, which represent truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation and the word of God. Wear them and you will not go down.

Got it? No? Why not? Because it’s a long and complicated checklist, right? So let me try to simplify it.

What’s the first piece of armor? *Truth*.

And the last? *The word of God*.

What’s the difference? There is no difference. Jesus said that “[God’s] word is truth” (John 17:3).

And what are we supposed to do with the truth of God’s Word? Believe it! That’s why the word *faith* is right there in the middle of the list.

And why are words *righteousness, gospel* and *salvation* included? Because they are three areas in which it's especially important for us to believe the truth of God's word, as they are areas that Satan loves to attack. So to put on the armor of God simply means to *put your faith in the truth of God's word*.

And how do we do that in a way that makes the devil flee from us? Ephesians 6:18 tells us: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Actually, that's not a new sentence—it's a continuation of verse 17: "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying in the Spirit on all occasions...."

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Well, if the sword of the Spirit is the spoken word of God, then it just means to pray using well-chosen words of Scripture. You don't have to talk to the devil. Talk to God—out loud. "Father, the devil is saying (insert lie here) to me, but Scripture says (insert truth here), and I have faith in the truth of Your Word. So protect me from this lie by helping me trust what You have said."

That is how to resist the devil: *Pray with faith in the truth of God's Word*. If you don't get

anything else out of this article, get this: Life is not a game; life is war. And if you want to stand firm against your evil enemy, who is for more powerful than you are, you're going to have to access God's power—and the way to do it is by praying with faith in the truth of His word.

So, how are you being attacked these days? What is the devil doing to try make you a casualty? What temptation is he dangling? What lie is he whispering?

What truth do you need to believe? What words of Scripture do you need to pray?

Maybe you're thinking, *I know how I am being attacked, but I have no idea where in my Bible to find ammunition to fight back*. Then my question is, how are you going to find it? Who are you going to ask for help? And how long can you afford to wait?

Steve Camp wrote a song about spiritual warfare entitled *Run to the Battle*, with lyrics that tell us how to use the armor to defeat our adversary:

He has trampled down the enemy
And has given us the victory
When we pray we learn to see
His armies are marching on their knees.

Touché.