

The Sword of the Spirit

The Millers have a busy but consistent routine. In addition to Sunday worship, every Sunday night the family attends the small group Bible studies organized by their church's discipleship ministry.

Lately though, Ed and Ann have been considering dropping out of their group. They just "haven't been getting anything out of the study." It seems as though they're just going through the motions without real life change. Surely they can study their Bibles just as well on their own.

How would you advise Ed and Ann? What do you think the Enemy is saying to them? What might be wrong with their conclusion? Isn't studying the Bible individually as good as studying it in a group or with a study book? What effect would their dropping out have?

BELIEVING IN THE POWER OF THE WORD

Words have power. How powerful are the words God inspired, protected, and gave to us as His Word?

The Word Teaches Us Who God Is

The Devil is a face-to-face attacker. The word translated "sword" in Ephesians 6:17 is the word used for the short sword that a Roman soldier carried for close combat. He used the sword when he stood face-to-face with an enemy combatant. **We need the sword of the Spirit to defend ourselves in these battles with the Enemy.**

The sword of the Spirit is "the most conspicuously offensive weapon" in all of the armor that God gives us. We learned that the Word of God is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, reliable, and rewarding (Ps. 19:7-11). **This perfect sword of the Spirit shows us who God is and reminds us that He is much greater than the Enemy.**

Satan is ...

but God ...

1. a destroyer (Rev. 9:11)

**is the _____
(Gen. 1:1).**

2. limited by God (Job 1:12)

**is _____
(Gen. 17:1).**

3. the father of lies (John 8:44)

**is _____
(John 14:6)**

4. a murderer (John 8:44)

**is _____
(1 John 4-8).**

5. evil (Matt. 6:13)

**is _____
(Jer. 23:6).**

6. our accuser (Rev. 12:10)

**is our _____
(1 John 2:1).**

7. the tempter (Matt. 4:3)

**always provides a way out of
_____ (1 Cor. 10:13).**

The Word teaches that God is creator, almighty, truth, love, and righteousness. Jesus is our advocate with the Father, who always provides a way out of temptation. **When we know these truths about God as revealed in the Word, we are equipped to stand against the Enemy who gets in our face.**

But living in obedience takes more than just reading and believing the Word; it also takes trusting the Spirit to convict us and empower us (John 16:7-10; Acts 1:8). **Note in Acts 1-3 the difference between scared believers and active witnesses, because of the indwelling power of the Spirit.** Read the Word, and don't ignore the Spirit by depending on yourself instead of God.

The Word Teaches Us That God Is Sovereign over the Enemy

We are in a real battle against a real Enemy, **but the Enemy has never been outside of God's control. Even when he is face-to-face against us, the Enemy is still on God's leash.** Biblical examples.

Satan attacked Job, but he could go only as far as God allowed him (Job 1:6-12). The demons exorcised from a demoniac in the Gerasenes could go only where Jesus permitted them (Luke 8:32). Satan had to ask permission from God to attack Peter (Luke 22:31). Paul struggled with a thorn in the flesh that he called a "messenger of Satan," but God determined whether the thorn would be removed (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

How does this truth help us when we're under attack? First, God always has a greater purpose for us when He allows the Enemy to attack us. **He uses battles to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), that conforming happens as warfare forces us to depend on God for our strength.**

Second, the Enemy doesn't strike us with random attacks. His attacks somehow fit into God's sovereign plan. **What the Enemy means for evil, God turns to good (Gen. 50:19-20).**

Third, our victory in the battle depends on God's accomplishing His will rather than on our strength to *fight*. We are still commanded to put on the armor; therefore, both our preparation for and response to attack are important. **The Word gives us this powerful, good news: God gains the victory.**

The Word Teaches Us That God Will Bind the Enemy

God had no intention of leaving us guessing about the Enemy's future: he will be bound and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10). **God's always been in control of the Enemy.**

From his judgment in the Garden of Eden to his imprisonment in the end, Satan has been, is being, and will be bound.

God is greater than the Enemy. We find all of these truths in the Word of God, which Paul calls the sword of the Spirit. This sword is indeed powerful, with its truths in mind; we should be willing to march forward in Christian obedience.

RECOGNIZING THE ENEMY'S STRATEGIES

The Word is "inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Yet, many believers fail to read and follow the Word consistently. We often choose not to use the power at hand.

Do you know how the Enemy works to keep us from reading and memorizing the Word? Let's begin with a time of reflection.

Circle any phrases that describe why you may struggle with reading the Word consistently.

I'm too busy.

I'm not trained on how to use the Bible.

I don't understand the words.

I get frustrated trying to interpret it.

It makes me feel guilty.

I don't know where to start.

I don't really believe the Bible is the Word of God.

I've tried to read it before, but it didn't help me live more faithfully.

The Enemy Leads Us to Doubt God's Character and His Word

The strategy of casting doubt isn't new. (Gen. 3:1-5) If God's Word isn't accurate or can't be trusted, we have no legitimate authority on which to base our Christian lives. The Word

claims to be truth (Num. 23:19; Ps. 19:7; 119:86; Prov. 30:5; 2 Tim 3:16), but the Enemy doesn't want us to accept those claims.

Because God "inspired" Scripture (2 Tim 3:16), studying His character and the nature of His words will help us understand the truth of Scripture.

Numbers 23:19	God isn't a man who _____
2 Samuel 7:28	God's words are _____
John 17:17	God's word is _____
Titus 1:2	God can't _____
Hebrews 6:18	It's impossible for God to _____

God doesn't lie; His words are truth and the Enemy is entirely wrong when he leads us to doubt the Word.

The Enemy Wants to Substitute Religion for Knowing the Word

Are you not deceived because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God?... You are badly deceived (Mark 12:24, 27).

Jesus reminded religious leaders that they didn't even know their own Scriptures. Twice Jesus told the Sadducees that they were deceived, suggesting the Enemy's hand in their lives.

According to Jesus, the Sadducees didn't know His Word.

Serving as leaders and teachers in the church without really knowing God's Word is dangerous. If we can lead the church without knowing the Word, why take time to read, know, and memorize it now? When we lead without knowing the Word, we risk misleading people—and the Enemy delights in that possibility.

The Enemy Wants Us to Listen to Voices Other than God's

But when that serpent spoke, they were faced with a decision: to whose voice would they listen? **Their choice proved fatal.**

That wouldn't be the last time God's people would need to make a choice between opposing voices. The psalmist understood that happiness comes by rejecting the advice of the wicked and instead delighting in the instruction of the Lord (Ps. 1:1-2).

We face choices. Think about some other voices that beckon us.

- **The media that often reject Christian values.**
- **Political correctness.**
- **Fictional religious novels that influence our doctrine.**
- **As judicial system that legislates in opposition to Christian morals.**
- **A culture that proclaims actions and attitudes the Bible condemns.**
- **Popular church leaders who preach prosperity, health, and happiness.**
- **Others** _____

The Enemy speaks loudly through these voices, and the options he offers are usually inviting.

It's easier to listen to these voices than to invest in reading and knowing God's Word. It pleases the Devil when we ignore the sword of the Spirit that so threatens him. Decide now that you will read the Word of God and not be guided by the other voices.

COUNTERING THE ENEMY'S STRATEGIES

The Enemy has strategies to keep us from reading the Word of God. Paul told us to put on the armor of God in order to stand against his schemes (Eph. 6:11). **The Devil's strategies sometimes attack us head-on, but more often he works subtly and slyly to catch us with our guard down.**

The Enemy works to keep us from reading the Word; we must intentionally and consistently choose to read it. **We need a strategy to read the Word of God.**

Develop a Reading and Study Plan

Time management produces faithful Bible study. **We tend to push Bible study aside when we have so many other activities to do. Consider these ways to plan your reading and study.**

Read through the Bible in a year. Bible reading is not necessarily Bible study, but it does provide light for study by giving us the entire scope of the Word of God.

Read through one book at a time. Reading in this way helps you see central themes and major teachings in a book.

Do a doctrinal/topical study. A Bible concordance lists by topic all the Scriptures that contain a certain word. For example, you might take a look at the teaching about prayer.

Choose a Bible character to study. When I wonder why God would dare use me in His church, Peter's story gives me hope.

Develop a Learning Plan

When you have a specific plan to reinforce and learn the Scriptures in-depth, the plan strengthens our reading of the Word.

Here is the strategy that helps me stay faithful to my learning plan.

- 1. Follow a reading plan.** Generally, my primary plan is to read through the Scriptures in a year.
- 2. Always pray before reading.** Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in understanding and applying God's Word.
- 3. Use a good study Bible.** The notes that accompany the text are not the inspired Word of God, but they can help us understand the Word.
- 4. Don't be afraid to utilize good commentaries.** They are good resources to understand the background and the contexts of scriptural texts.
- 5. As you read, be alert to verses to memorize.**
- 6. Using good principles of interpretation, look for truths, insights, and examples to guide you in Christian living. Find a workable method for recording these teachings.**
- 7. Make any changes or commitments that the Scriptures require each day.**

Join a Bible Study Group

Studying the Bible in a group has several advantages. First group study allows us to learn from each other. A group setting allows us to test our conclusions. Second, group study holds us accountable to our personal study. Third, the group with whom we study can minister to us in times of need. Group members sometimes become our closest friends and prayer partners.

The Enemy will not be pleased when you decide to study God's Word with other believers.

Read the Word so that you can take up the sword of the Spirit. Your task now is simply to do it in God's strength. Family or job responsibilities are not reasonable barriers. God gives us the time we need to accomplish His will, or He wouldn't ask us to do it. The question is more, "Where are your priorities?"

What is the biggest obstacle you face to effective Bible study?

What is your plan to overcome that obstacle?

OVERCOMING THE ENEMY'S LIES

In times of disobedience, have you doubted your salvation? If so, what was the outcome? Would you turn to the Scriptures for direction?

One aspect of rightly using the sword of the Spirit is to know God's Word well enough to respond biblically to the Enemy's lies (which is another reason that he doesn't want us to read the Word).

Read each of the following stories, and then describe the person God forgives.

1. Mark 5:25-34 _____

2. Luke 7:35-50 _____

3. Luke 8:1-2 _____

4. Luke 19:1-40 _____

5. Acts 9:1-19 _____

God forgives all who turn to Him in belief and repentance in response to His Spirit, regardless of their sin.

When we confess our sin—which means we agree with God’s judgment and are repenting of that sin—“He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). In a supernatural, amazing way God takes the stain of our sin and makes it white as snow (Isa. 1:18)!

“You Will Never Overcome That Sin.”

Maybe you’ve been there. You responded to God’s calling you to Him, but the temptations are stronger than ever. You fail once, twice, and then again. **Maybe I’m just kidding myself.”**
Doubts lead to defeat and further disobedience—and the Devil wins this round.

Romans 7:14-24, Paul, too, understood the battle involved in trying to live in Christian obedience.

Even when he wanted to do good, he often did not. The battle between his old and new self, remained. Sin reared its head even when Paul longed to do right. Is there any hope for us when we are caught in our sin? Paul answered his own questions in the next verses:

- “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25).
- “No condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

The sword of the Spirit teaches us that through Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, we have been freed from the judgment of the law, which is sin and death. Instead, we are in Christ Jesus, who promises forgiveness and restoration. We counter the Enemy’s lies by trusting this truth.

“The Church Will Never Accept You Again.”

When we accept God’s standard and admit that we broke His law, we can confidently ask God for forgiveness. Although He forgives us for that wrong, the church is sometimes less forgiving. The Apostle Paul addressed this in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

Paul warned the Corinthians that they must forgive “so that [they] may not be taken advantage of by Satan” (v. 11). To refuse to offer love, forgiveness, and grace to a repentant church member is decidedly unchristian (Eph. 4:32) and is playing the Enemy’s game.

Believers must make restoration the goal of any disciplinary act (see Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1). We wield the sword of the Spirit well. When we closely follow the Bible's teachings about restoration.

The Enemy loses when fallen sinners are welcomed home again.

Mark each statement as T (true) or F (false).

- _____ 1. I have been guilty of judging other church members, which led to their leaving rather than being restored.
- _____ 2. My offer of forgiveness to church members depends on what sin they committed.
- _____ 3. I have followed others instead of studying the Word of God for myself.
- _____ 4. Sometimes I've accepted the Enemy's lies and have lived in spiritual defeat.
- _____ 5. I didn't realize how important the sword—God's Word—is in overcoming the Enemy's lies.

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

Think about the Word of God. Read it, study it, memorize it, speak it, live it, believe it, trust it, follow it, learn it, obey it and journal it.

Paul typically used two Greek words that can be translated as "word" (either *logos* or *rhema*). The word he used in Ephesians 6:17 (*rhema*) often refers to the word *proclaimed*, or spoken word.

Paul wrote that we defeat the Enemy not only by reading and knowing the Word, but also by speaking its truth. *When we share the gospel, the Spirit of God uses the Word to penetrate hearts, and the Devil loses another round.*

We review biblical truths about warfare so that we might assuringly speak to others who need to hear these truths.

Colossians 2:15 teaches that Jesus defeated the Enemy's powers through His death on the cross.

Curtis Vaughan commented, “Christ, in this picture, is the conquering general; the powers and authorities are the vanquished enemy displayed at the spoils of battle before the entire universe. To the casual observer the cross appears to be only an instrument of death, the symbol of Christ’s defeat; Paul represents it as Christ’s chariot of victory.”

Jesus died as the perfect, righteous sacrifice (Heb. 7:26-27) who became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Having satisfied God’s wrath against us (1 John 2:1-2), He publicly broke the Enemy’s power through His death and resurrection. Jesus ultimately defeated Satan not by public displays of power but by His surrender to a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

We must announce this good news to others.

The Enemy Can’t Nullify God’s Grace

Zechariah 3:1-7. Read this passage in your Bible, and answer these questions.

1. Who was the accuser in this story?

2. What image indicates that Joshua was guilty and sinful?

3. What image shows that God forgave Joshua?

4. Was Satan strong enough to stop God from extending grace to guilty Joshua?

Yes _____ No _____

Joshua was clearly guilty, as evidenced by his filthy garments. Satan sought to accuse him, knowing that he had sufficient grounds to do so. God, however, stepped in and rebuked the Accuser. Instead, He gave Joshua clean garments that represented His forgiveness and justification. Joshua was guilty, yet the Accuser could not stop God from extending His grace. We’re all guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), and none of us is good (Mark 10:18). Nevertheless, God graciously saves us and gives us the clean garments of His righteousness

(2 Cor. 5:21). His grace is always more powerful than the Enemy's accusations. That's great news for all of us!

New believers didn't always live godly lives. Sometimes they messed up. **Their testimonies have been stories of second chances. I'm continually thankful that the Enemy's brief victories couldn't nullify God's grace in their lives. In what ways did God make His grace known to you? How many times has He granted you a second chance? It's no wonder that we sing of God's grace as amazing.**

We announce good news. When we do, we take up the sword of the Spirit and offensively move against the Enemy.

God Fights the Battle for Us

Read Exodus 14:13-14 and 1 Samuel 17:46-47. What do each of these passages teach you about battles?

The battle is real, but God will accomplish His plan through the battle. Moses' words, "The LORD will fight for you: (Ex. 14:14) and David's words, "The battle is the LORD's (1 Sam. 17:47). When we realize God fights the battles for us, we have no reason to fear or be discouraged. The ultimate outcome is never in question because no one can defeat God.

The ultimate outcome of spiritual warfare is never in doubt, because God is all-powerful; however, our choices in the battle do affect our lives. It is when I try to fight my own battles that I find myself in the most trouble.

We need to announce the good news that we have no reason to fight battles in our own power. The Word of God shows us that the almighty God who cannot be defeated fights for us. That's powerfully good news!

A Review

Note one more time how the armor pieces can't be separated:

- **Wearing the belt of truth is not possible without knowing the Word—the sword of the Spirit.**
- **The righteousness associated with the breastplate is described in the Word.**

- **Our feet are sandaled with the gospel of peace found in the Word.**
- **The foundation for the shield of faith is the Word that proclaims God's promises on which faith is built.**
- **The Word of God describes the salvation associated with the helmet.**

God has divinely interlinked the armor so that the pieces naturally fit together and cannot be separated. *Are you wearing the whole armor of God?*