

Rules of Engagement

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Small Group Questions

Opening: Are you a reader? What was the last book you read? Why did you read it?

- 1. Satan's strategy is to tempt us to disobey God. Read 1 John 2:15-17. Three general temptations include:**

Pleasure

Possessions

Pride

Which of these do you most struggle with?

- 2. Everyone has a world view. What are the major messages American media preaches to us? How hard is it for Christians to counter and combat the secular world view we encounter every day?**

- 3. Read Hebrews 4:12. Discuss ways in which the Word of God works in your own personal life.**

- 4. Four Keys to Using Your Sword:**

Read it

Study it

Memorize it

Obey it

Discuss the various challenges to each of these activities.

Which one presents the greatest challenge for you?

- 5. Engaging with the Bible is reading, studying, etc. is not about checking a box and making God happier with you. It is about investing in a relationship that has the power to change you.**

When it comes to the Bible what attitude do you bring to it?

Obligation, Fear, Dread, Desire, Hunger

Can you think of other attitudes?

- 6. How would you advise someone interested in getting started with the Bible?**

- 8. What is the most important and practical principle you learned from this teaching on the Sword of the Spirit?**

Ephesians 6:10-17, (P. 979)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 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,

The Belt of Truth

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The Shoes of Peace

The Shield of Faith

The Helmet of Salvation

The Sword of the Spirit

Paul uses the term, *Macharia* (Not *Macarena*, but *macharia*) It referred to a specific knife that was more like what we would call a dagger; anywhere from six to eighteen inches long. This is what would be called a broadsword; this is actually called the sword of Solomon. This, on the other hand, is what Paul would be referring to. The dagger had a special use reserved for hand to hand combat, when the enemy got up close and personal. It was at the point in the battle where shooting a flaming arrow wasn't affected. You've just come face to face with the enemy and the defensive position is no longer an option. You now have to engage the enemy. And so, you needed to know how to use your weapon. Why is all this important?

Satan's Arsenal: TEMPTATION

I John 2:15-16 (P. 1019)

Satan tempted Eve. Satan tempted Jesus. John 13:2 says that Satan put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. Acts 5:3 says that Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit. Oscar Wilde said: I can resist anything except temptation. We can relate. But 1 Corinthians 10:13 says you always have a way out of temptation, you always have a choice. I John gives us three predictable areas that Satan uses to tempt us.

I John 2:15-16 (P. 1019)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life^[a]—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Three things: Pleasure - the desires of the flesh. Possessions - the desires of the eyes. Pride - the pride of life.

Genesis 3:6 (NIV)

Satan knows your vulnerabilities and seeks to capitalize on your weaknesses.

Paul says to be aware of his schemes.

Genesis 3:6 (NIV)

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Good for food: so here's the temptation to pleasure, something that might fulfill a physical desire. Pleasing to the eye: so she wanted to possess it, she was attracted to it. Desirable for gaining wisdom: the pursuit of pride. Paul says: Satan will come at you to tempt you to pleasure, possessions and pride. So, you've got to put on the armor of God. And you need to take up the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

The Believer's Armor:

The New Testament uses two different words translated 'word.'

If you've been around a while, you've probably heard the Greek word,

Logos The Greek word for word; logos.

John 1:1 (ESV)

In the beginning was the Word, (*Logos*) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus is the word of God in the flesh, the living word of God. He is the physical expression of God's Word. There is a second Greek Word pronounced, '*Rhema*'

John 6:63 (ESV)

The words (*Rhema*) that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Rhema denotes that which is spoken or written. Here's the point: Paul uses the word, *rhema*, in Ephesians 6 referring to the sword of the Spirit which is not *logos*, the living word, but rather, *rhema*, the written word. So you have the Bible; the *logos* of God: the Word of God. But also, in the Bible, you have the 'words' of God. In Ephesians, Paul's emphasis is not so much on the body of scripture we call the Bible, but to the body of scripture's; the various principles and precepts, the commands and instructions of the Lord. You see, the sword had a particular function. And so, you take up the sword for a particular purpose. Satan's temptations vary. And Paul is telling, it doesn't matter what temptation comes at you, you have, not just the Word of God, but the words of God that ward off those particular temptations. Here's another way to look at it.

1. The Bible as Truth

Number one: you have the truth of the Bible. Francis Schafer: "Biblical Christianity is not simply a series of truths in the plural but truth spelled with a capital 'T.' Truth about everything not just about religious things."

John 17:17 (NIV)

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Capital 'T' Here's what he meant: The Bible gives us truth about ourselves, about our world, about where we came from, what's wrong with us, and how He going to fix it. There's a term for that and it's called 'a world view.' The Bible gives us an accurate and complete view of our world. Through the Bible we can see, understand and interpret our world. Everybody has a world view. You might call it a philosophy of life. Everyone walks through life pragmatically. In other words, we operate in life out of the way we understand our world, what makes sense to us. If I were to ask you questions about sexuality, politics, relationships, the environment. How you answer those questions would reveal to me your particular world view. A lot of us don't even know we have one. But everybody that's ever thought about the basic questions of life: Where did we come from, how did we get here? What's wrong us? How do you explain the human

dilemma? And how can this be fixed? You listen to the radio, watch the talk shows, sitcoms, movies, music, politicians, sociologists, they're all trying to answer the basic questions of life. How many of you watch Jerry Springer? (I don't know if he's even on any more?) but if you watch Jerry Springer, first of all, you're pathetic and need to get a life. But Jerry Springer is demonstrating a world view.

Oprah, Anderson Cooper, Bill O'Reilly. The educational system, political system, religious systems - they're all trying to answer the basic questions of life out of their own world view. Friends: this is the Bible - and it answers those questions for us. The Bible tells us we were created by a good and beneficent deity. The Bible tells us that sin corrupted the world in which we live. The Bible tells us that God has a redemptive plan to might all things right. That's truth with a capital 'T.'

2. The Truths of the Bible

We have the truths of the Bible: the principles and precepts by which to operate out of a Biblical world view. For example: The Bible tells us that life was created by God, in the image of God. That's enormous truth that informs the way we treat life. The issues of abortion, euthanasia, marriage; issues of authority, capital punishment, principles of a just war. You treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated. The Bible gives us these truths by which to operate within a Biblical world view. Not just the big picture, but it gets very personal and practical.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This is a living book. That's why you don't read once and put it down. It meets you where you are. It has energy and power, it's alive. It's a sword that not only cuts through the temptation of the evil one, it cuts you. It pierces your heart, it slices through your attitudes and your behaviors. It exposes the condition of your soul. And it gets sharper and sharper every time you use it.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

The Bible provides us truths, or principles and precepts by which to operate our lives in a way that's good, healthy, productive and beneficial to all. It's inspired, divine, infallible, inerrant, complete, sufficient, authoritative and effective. It is the source of your power, the source of your victory, the source of your happiness. This is where God speaks to us. And gives us what we need to stand firm in the fight against our enemy; the one who seeks to destroy everything God created.

The Rules of Engagement:

So, how are we to use our sword? How can we best employ the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God? Let's get really practical.

1. Read It

Isaiah 34:16 (NIV)

Look in the scroll of the LORD and read.

Read. How do you know the Word of God? You read it. Google: Bible reading plans and you'll come up with loads of options. You can get an app on your smart phone that gives the Bible any time you want. It will give you reading plans and schedules and different translations. It has never been easier to read the Bible. If you are an average reader: Fifteen minutes a day and you can read the entire Bible in a year. Twenty minutes a day and you can read the entire New Testament in a month. Now, let me say this: the point is not checking off a list to get it done. The point is allowing the Spirit of God to influence you with the Word of God. We are bombarded by media all the time: radio, television, movies, music. Listen: you're picking up the view of the world in the things you're exposing yourself to. You've got to spend time exposing yourself to what's true, with a capital 'T.' The major argument I get about Bible reading is you don't understand what you read. So, the first thing I want to say is this: most people don't understand it because they don't read it. They pick it up once, read a chapter, didn't get it so you sit it down and walk away. Listen, I seldom read anything of substance that I don't have to go over again to make sure I've got it. You've got to make a more consistent effort. Two things: one - The more time you spend reading, the more you begin to comprehend. And two - keep your reading manageable and beneficial. If you're reading ten chapters a day, you're reading too much. If you're reading one verse a day, you're reading too little. Bottom line: read it.

2. Study It

The sword of the spirit is the *rhema* of God; the truths of God, which means there's not a temptation you face, that God's Word is not effective in giving you strength to get through and victory to overcome. But you've got to know how to use it.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

That's verse isn't just for the pastor, it's for you. Bible studies resources have never been more available; dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, study Bibles of all shapes and sizes, online study tools. I'll say it again: you've got to make a consistent effort. Here's a practical tip: get a notebook and journal. Read a passage and then write out the thoughts God gives you about that passage. If there's a challenge in understanding, consult some resources. But here's what I've found - when I journal, it's amazing the clarity that comes to me when I start putting thoughts to paper after I've read the word of God. Read it, study it, number three.

3. Memorize It

(Pastor Tim, you didn't just say that. Yes. I did) I've talked about this before. A lot of you think you can't memorize scripture, you can't memorize anything and that's simply not true. You know your phone number, your address, your social security number. Some of you ladies can bake cookies without the recipe. Some of you men can fix a car without consulting a manual. Why? Two things - we memorize what we practice. It takes effort, once again. We memorize what we practice. And two, we memorize what's practical.

Psalm 119:11 (NIV)

**I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.**

You know your struggles. And you know the Bible has truths for you in those struggles.

The Bible is your weapon. Think about it: when Satan came up against Jesus, Jesus didn't have time to say, 'wait a minute Satan, I've got to pull out my concordance, I know there's something in here about that.' All three temptations Jesus didn't hesitate - he quoted the Word of God. Your spiritual health, your spiritual protection is dependent on how well you're able to use your sword. Read it, study it, memorize it.

4. Obey it

Mark Twain said: it's not the parts of the bible I don't understand that trouble me, it's the parts I do understand that trouble me. Most of our problem isn't knowing what to do, it's doing what we know. A lot of us know more of the Bible than we're willing to apply.

Luke chapter five records the story of the disciples spending the entire night fishing and catching nothing. Some of you know the frustration of that. Jesus comes along and says, hey, drop your net on the other side of the boat. Now, I don't know about you, but there's a part of me that just simply resists doing what someone tells me to do, it's sinful nature, I know. But in this situation; they've already done what they know and Jesus tells them to do something else. The response of Peter is so instructive to us.

Luke 5:5 (NIV)

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

What would happen to the quality of your life? What would happen to the level of your joy, the strength of your resolve, the effectiveness of your witness; what would happen to the depth of your faith - if you just took the attitude - Jesus, because you say so.

For no other reason than you are the Living Word of God. And I will take the truths of your word, whether I understand it or not, whether I like it or not, because you say so, I'm going to do it. The more you obey it, the more you understand it. This book is life to you.

What Must I Do to Stand Firm?

In Genesis 3, you have the temptation of Eve. In Matthew 4, you have the temptation of Jesus. Eve was tempted in the Garden. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. Man was in the Garden, with everything he could possibly want and yet he was tempted to want more. God has been so good to us. And yet we are never satisfied. Satan always tempts us to look beyond the blessing we enjoy. Adam and Eve had everything and yet they folded when tempted. Jesus was in the wilderness with nothing. He didn't have food, he didn't have water. He didn't have the companionship of people. He had no resource to supply his human need. In Adam's case God's Word was ignored and resulted in cosmic destruction. In Christ's case God's Word was employed and resulted in cosmic redemption. In the book of Romans Jesus is called the second Adam.

Jesus is Adam in reverse. He reversed the curse for you and me. And He has given us everything we need for life and godliness. We have the power of the Spirit and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.