

Series: FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT: God's Strategic Plan to Set Us Free

SUNDAY AUGUST 12, 2018

WATCH YOUR STEP!

Ephesians 6:15

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1. When we had our first child, we asked our pediatrician about shoes--thinking he would recommend outrageously expensive orthotic shoes we'd have to sell the car to buy. He said, "My advice is--buy them big and cheap." ***I liked that advice!***

-Whenever I saw people spending \$100 on a pair of running shoes, I thought, "Why would anyone blow that kind of money to get some fancy label on the side and a few reflectors?" Then I started running! ***Then*** I got my first leg cramps. And ***then*** I woke up one morning and it felt like someone had driven a nail into my heel! It was my first case of ***plantar fasciitis*** and had to stop running for **6 months** --then start over! God spoke to my heart. He said, "Ken, you'd better not **mess with your feet!**" **Now I'm a Believer!**
 - a. At first glance, feet seem to be the joke God has played on the body. Strange looking. Wonky looking toes. Smelly. When Solomon wrote erotic poetry about his beloved's body--he mentioned ***everything*** else--but he didn't say a ***word*** about her feet!
No one sits down and writes poetry about them, but the feet take it all in stride. I know--bad joke. And the truth is, they--feet, that is--can do ***much*** better if they're protected by a good pair of shoes!
 - b. This passage says, **Peace is like a good pair of shoes!**

Therefore put on the full armour 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. Stand firm then ...with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. (Ephesians 6:13,15 NIV)
2. Most of you have probably heard of Alexander the Great, right? He was a great military leader who lived 400 years before Christ. One of his greatest military achievements was the mobility of his soldiers. This enabled him to move quickly and change positions quickly in the middle of a battle. Can anyone guess what his ***secret*** was? Sandals. Military issue.

-These sandals were specially made--with thick soles and heavy leather straps. They even had the equivalent of ***winter treads***--bits of metal imbedded in the bottom for traction.
 - a. Who would ever think that army boots would be worth mentioning in a list of strategic armour? But think of the dynamics. Imagine a soldier walking 30 or 40 miles in bare feet over rocks and sticks--and the potential for cutting or bruising their feet. What do soldiers do when they get to their destination? They have to fight for their lives.

-In the first century enemy soldiers would sometimes whittle sticks to a sharp point and imbed them in the paths to create problems for an army coming their way. Fighting for your life--on feet that are cut and bleeding and infected would be like being in a car chase with flat tires.

-There's something else here; as you might guess, soldiers didn't just fight on nice sunny days. Sometimes it was rainy and muddy and slippery. Imagine being in hand-to-hand combat--and suddenly, **Whoops!** You're flat on your back. At that point you're in deep doodoo!

- b. So, the Romans borrowed the sandal strategy from Alexander the Great--and they too had one of the most powerful armies on the face of the earth. Sandals aren't real impressive--but critically important to success.

-In this whole passage describing how to face the spiritual enemy we're up against, there's one word that comes up a lot. See if you can pick it out:

Therefore, put on the full armour 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. STAND firm then... (Ephesians 6:13ff NIV)

-The word is? STAND. What do you stand **on**? FEET! So, I want to talk about how **peace** helps you **stay** standing and keeps you alert.

3. The specific phrase this passage uses is: **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.** I want to just start at the top end to explain what that means.

-Do any of you know what the word **gospel** literally means? **Good news.** How many of you have ever gotten **Good News**? A number of years ago, Lori had major surgery. So I paced back and forth in the waiting room, looking at the clock. Finally, the surgeon came out with **Good News.** Everything was going to be okay. Good news makes you want to sing, dance, laugh, cry, write bad checks and go to **The Keg** for supper!

-The **Good News**--the **gospel** is that God saw the mess we were in and the hopeless mess the world was in. So He intervened through His Son to make peace--and make **all** things right--forever!

- a. I'll tell you why that is so profound. We are born with a rebellious heart--and we aren't too far along before we learn how to sin. We don't even need training.

Now...we **do** learn how to shine up the exterior and look as good as the next person, but there is something deeply broken about us. And because of that, we hurt God, we hurt others, and we hurt ourselves. And we **can't stop!**

-But **instead** of staying away, God came close. Jesus made peace between us and God by taking our punishment. And then through His Spirit, He turns us into **peacemakers**--not just **peace-lovers.** Peace **always** has a price tag--and its usually written in blood. In **this** case--it was the **Son's** blood. Listen to this description:

It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him--all things in heaven and on earth--for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood. This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies and hated him and were separated

from him by your evil thoughts and actions, yet now he has brought you back as his friends. (Colossians 1:19-22 TLB)

- b. **That** is what the **Good News** of Peace is all about. When you choose to accept God's offer of peace through his Son, Jesus Christ, you **change sides** from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

4. Now, I suspect that you **want** to be on God's side. Let's talk about what this means in practice. First, if you accepted God's terms of peace, you need to know that God is **for** you--more than anyone in your life has ever been for you.

When we were young, my brother and I, had an interesting relationship. We **occasionally** got along. The deal was that I'd **annoy him**, and he'd **pound me**. Can anyone relate? The interesting thing was that **he** was the **only** one who could pound me. We lived in this really rough neighbourhood where the neighbourhood bully started knocking me around.

-When my big brother found out, he chased the kid home from his paper route, pulled him off his bike, and beat the bejeebers out of him right on his front lawn. Even though it didn't **feel** like it lots of times--he was **for** me. Why did I tell you that? I'm not sure!

- a. The book of Romans says, "If God is **for** you--well, who can be **against** you? If he would give his Son for you, why wouldn't He give you **every** good thing? Why wouldn't He be in your corner every day--wanting the best for you, working so that even the evil things others do--work for your ultimate good?"

-So, hear me out on this. In **every** war, people have to decide which side they're on. When you're on the battle field, when your life is at stake, when your future is on the line, **you'd better know who the enemy is**--and who your biggest ally is. By the way, which side are **you** on?

-I've watched Christ-followers down through the years scrapping with God over every little piece of turf in their lives. And it's such a **stupid** battle.

Why wouldn't you want to **fully** belong, lock, stock and barrel, to the **only** One in this universe who would give his life to offer you peace? What's to fight over about that?

- b. Jesus suffering **horribly** to express His love for you. So **choose to follow Him! BE ALL THERE!** Go public, get baptized, declare yourself--and accept the terms of peace God offers you! You'll be **amazed** at what it feels like --the **inner peace** you find when you settle this issue.

-How many of you want to **still be standing** when it's all said and done? If so, you need peace with God. You need to be on the **right side! Every day!**

5. Lori and I were watching a documentary recently about WW2--specifically, the battle of Guadalcanal. The guy they were interviewing talked about being part of an invasion one night when it was pitch black. There was a shot fired close by, and he could tell from the moan that one of their fellow soldiers had been hit. As they tried to get a little sleep, before

the battle the next day, this guy who was wounded kept moaning and calling out. This soldier said, “My thought was, **Why don’t you just die!?”**”

-Shortly before dawn, the moaning stopped--he was dead. The next day they realized that he was wounded by **friendly fire**. A fellow soldier dropped his rifle and it went off. The man being interviewed said, “I realized, to my horror, in the light of day that the guy I’d wished would just **die** was my best friend. Another guy I heard of accidentally shot his daughter when she was trying to sneak back into the house through a bedroom window after meeting up with her boyfriend.

- a. Christians, you know, have been guilty of wounding God’s children--people they’ve been called to love. See, in the twilight of the war against Satan, we make bad choices and sometimes shoot people who are on the **same side**. We have this crazy notion that everyone should be like us and **agree** with us! How many of you think God is okay with that? It **grieves** the Spirit
- b. I’ll tell you **why** it grieves God. It’s because it cost Him **dearly**--His Son’s blood--to make it possible for all of us to **live at peace**. An earlier chapter in this same book talks about it:

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and *our hostility toward each other was put to death*. He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.

**Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.
(Ephesians 2:14-18 NLT)**

-Now, this is speaking specifically about Jews and Gentiles--but it applies to **any two believers in Christ** who have some kind of wall of hostility, some point between them that they disagree on. Christ has **already** broken this wall down. **He doesn’t want us rebuilding it** because it **cost him his life**.

- c. Let me just read some of what the New Testament says about living in peace with others. Jesus started it all with the final prayer he prayed with his disciples in John 17.

***I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. (John 17:20-21 NLT)**

*Live in harmony with one another...If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with EVERYONE. (Romans 12:16, 18 NIV)

*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Romans 14:19 NIV)

*God has called us to live in peace. God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15, 14:33 NIV)

*Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of all love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11 NIV)

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3 NIV)

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. (Colossians 3:15 NIV)

*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NIV)

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14 NIV)

-Now, I could read a *lot* more passages. Let me ask this: ***Why do you think these disciples of Jesus talk so much about PEACE?*** It's because it is the most *natural* way for us to get in trouble and *miss* one of God's greatest weapon's against Satan: **UNITY AND PEACE.**

- d. And He's made peace possible! That is, we have absolutely no excuse for our peace-killing, divisive ways:

He has put One Spirit, the Spirit of Peace, into our hearts, He's given us supernatural power to forgive, to be gentle and patient and understanding and loving.

-He's told us exactly what to do when we get sideways with another follower of Christ--or anyone for that matter. You--**approach** them. **Find** the truth. **Resolve** the issue. If you can't, **get help**. If even that doesn't work, get **more** help. See, the question is: **WHAT MORE CAN HE DO? HOW CAN HE MAKE IT ANY CLEARER?**

6. I want to ask a question, just for clarification. Does anyone remember **who** the enemy is? This classic passage we're studying on **fighting the good fight** tells us:

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 NLT)

Who's the enemy? It's not people. It's not those who disagree with you or annoy you. It's **Satan**. He's the enemy of your soul--and of everything you love and want.

-Let me get **very** specific about his plan for us as believers in Jesus: **Divide and conquer**. God is the God of **Peace**. If there is a "god of conflict", a "god of unrest, aggravation, upset, chafing, quarreling, complaining, hostility and division"--it's Satan.

Know why he uses disunity so much? It's **natural**; it strokes our ego; it **wounds** and it **distracts**.

- a. Use your imaginations for a minute. Imagine you're watching one of the final games between the Leafs and the Bruins You're excited--cause for the first time in a **long** time, the Leafs have a shot at the Stanley Cup. But as the game starts, the Leafs are at each other's throats; slamming each other into the sides, tripping each other. The contrast? The Bruins are unified--and kicking their butts! Who would win? It **wouldn't** be the Leafs!
- b. It's possible to burn down through all the spiritual fuel and energy and power God has given us to change the world--and use it to attack people we have to share Heaven with. Have you ever wondered **how** we're going to explain that to God when we give a final account--and we **will!**
- c. I want you to notice something in what this verse says about the sandals of peace. Let's read it:

Stand firm then ...with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. (Ephesians 6:13,15 NIV)

-Notice that **peace** is not really at the forefront of what it's saying. It's **readiness**. I don't know how much you know about warfare, but if you're not agile, able to move, alert--if you're not paying attention to what you're doing--you could die. And that's a **big** problem. Peace keeps you **alert to the things you NEED to be alert to!**

7. Now, I want you to listen carefully to me if you would, because this is **really** important. Right now, at this very moment, you could be at peace in your world. I want you to think about that. Imagine what it would be like to be totally at peace on all fronts--as far as it depends on you--so you can be **ready** to face the enemy of your soul. Remember what Jesus said his dream for his people was? That they would be a **kingdom of PEACEMAKERS**.
 - a. How many of you **love** peace? How many of you **want** peace? You'd be pretty odd if you didn't. Our world is **filled** with peace **lovers**. The problem is that there are not a lot of peace **makers!** And in our world, if you **want peace**, you will likely need to **make** it. And to make peace, you'll need to give up your little courtroom where you play prosecutor, judge and jury over those you don't like or agree with.

- b. Jesus defined peace **makers** better than anyone else. They're people who learn to not retaliate or get even. Peacemakers **love** their enemies and **pray** for people who persecute them. Peacemakers live with **humility**--they don't think of themselves as better than, smarter than, or more right than others.

-See, peace **making** boils right down to how you treat the others in your world. And Jesus defined that too: Treat others as... **you would like to be treated! All of them!** Peacemakers are quick to forgive, slow to get angry, slow to speak. Peacemakers carry on the ministry of reconciliation that Christ assigned to them.

- c. Friends, putting on **sandals of peace** will **not** just happen naturally. Something will have to change at the core of who we are. We have to **choose** peace. We have to **choose** gentleness. We have to **choose** humility.

-And if you can't? Won't? Don't? Well, then you never find the peace you want.

- c. And the problem is that grudges and anger and bitterness start building a root system. A bunker--complete with underground tunnels and an arsenal of weapons. And our **ego**, our **pride** keeps the whole thing alive.

-Let me say it again; one of the **core** components of peace-making is **humility**. Know what I've found? There are a **lot** of people who'd rather blow up their marriage, hurt their children, give themselves a stroke, get fired from a job or to **hell** than humble themselves! **Remember this guy?**

You can fight the **good fight**--or fight the **wrong fight!**

-Paul speaks to this in Philippians 2 and say, **Why don't you try acting like Jesus--who was God but didn't cling to that right for dear life--who humbled himself to become a man, then a servant--and then to dying on a cross!**

- I think he's saying that there's some pain in making peace! Sometimes a cross! See, if **God** humbled Himself to make peace with us, I'm thinking **He** expects that we will be willing to humble ourselves to make peace, too!

- b. The fact that we're told to **put on** the sandals of peace means having this internal, unshakable kind of **determination** to be a **peacemaker**. To simply **refuse** to engage. And refusing to engage means laying down your weapons--you know, the evidence you've collected about **why** the other person is **wrong** and you're **right**.

-Refusing to engage means ignoring comments and glances. It means letting God bring justice--not you. It means cleaning out your heart on a regular basis--choosing forgiveness and grace instead of the grudge you're nursing like a new born baby! Some days it means saying, "**Today, God, as far as it depends on me, I am going to live in peace!**" -There are days when, in praying on the armour of God, I say, "God, help these feet of mine to walk in ways that **lead to peace** today!"

8. There's a final area that I want to briefly mention this morning. And that's inner peace. Jesus Christ didn't just make a way for peace between us and God. He didn't just make a way to give us the power of His Spirit to live at peace with others.

The Prince of Peace came to offer you and me inner peace--right in the middle of difficulty and anxiety and heartache--and all of our feelings of failure and guilt. Chaos in our hearts leads us to **really** bad decisions.

- a. We talked a little about this a few weeks ago--about how regret from our past has a way of hunting us down, kicking us in the stomach, and berating us and shaming us. And then we lie there, gasping for air--incapacitated. And **here's what you need to know--THAT IS NOT FROM GOD!!**

-I didn't always understand that. Sometimes a memory of one of my many screw-ups would stop me in my tracks--and I'd be repenting and agonizing over it until it ruined my day. Then I read these words:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10 NIV)

-What this means is that when God works in your heart to bring a sense of conviction over wrong-doing--there is **always** something you can do about it. Confess it to Him, find forgiveness--ask the person you've hurt to forgive you.

-That's **godly** sorrow. See, God **never** torments you or me with failure or wrongdoing that's been washed and forgiven--you know, to make sure we feel really bad about our past and awful about ourselves. That's called **worldly** sorrow, and it leads to death. It just eats us up on the inside.

- b. Here's the deal; I don't care what you've done, I don't care how unforgiving the people are that you've asked forgiveness from. If you've grieved for your sin and thrown yourself on the grace and mercy of God--you've been totally washed. You've been given a fresh chance and your past has been covered by the blood of Jesus.
- c. So, guess who the accuser is--who is out to steal our peace? One guess. It's Satan. And if you listen to him, you **will** lose your peace--and you will get knocked off your feet. Discouragement and feelings of failure, inadequacy are some of his favourite weapons. If you want to stay standing, you have to have the **readiness**, the **alertness to** the Gospel of Peace.

9. There's another part to this inner peace that I'll bet a whole bunch of you are facing this very moment. It's the inner anxiety and hurt and storm that comes in the middle of difficult times. You begin to dwell on whatever problem you happen to be facing--and it just grinds you up inside. Some of you know that feeling--because it's going on **right now!** And you're **tempted to take a short cut of some kind!**

-It happens in lots of ways. Financial trouble. Some kind of medical challenge. Anxiety over your children--maybe something one of them is going through. You feel the waves

pounding the shore inside your chest--and it leaves you drained, scared, tired and overwhelmed. And you have this tenseness that travels right up the back of your neck.

-Satan, the **ultimate opportunist** is out to use this to destroy your confidence in God. Distract you. Make you feel alone and deserted. And when you're in this condition--you're **very** vulnerable! And there's a verse in the Bible that hits this dead-on. Let me read it:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

- a. **Don't worry about anything...pray about everything.** This is saying, "Peace could be yours. Right now. It could be. This same Jesus who, on a number of occasions stood up, spread out his arms and spoke to the sea and said, "Peace! Be still!" can do the same to the storm going on in your heart.

-But **you** need to hand over your problems--and leave them with Him. And you can have peace. Peace that God loves you--and that even though you have no idea what He's doing, He really is the Master of every storm. And you're not going down. You're okay, because He's the master of the storm! **Every storm!**

- b. As I was in the middle of working on this message, I woke up one morning early--unable to sleep--**filled** with anxiety over a decision Lori and I were making. It's like being in a boat in the middle of a **really** bad storm. If you've ever been there--you know that it wears you out. Drains you. Makes you **seasick!** Stay there long, and you're too tired to think--to pre-occupied to do anything.

-I could hardly **wait** to get alone with God to talk to Him. See, I've been there before--and if I can take time to remember that He's my **Father**--that he's **always** with me--and Yahweh **Shalom** the God of all peace--and that He's my **Shepherd**--it's a wake up call. Then I dumped all this stuff into **his** arms--and I found the peace this passage talks about. I'm telling you--**it works!**

-Sometimes **angels** show up--but they actually look and talk like **friends who care!** Sometimes I receive wisdom and insight from God in a split second! There have been times when I've feel flooded with immense joy--and gratitude--**totally** out of character for what I was facing. Bottom line, **God showed up.** Actually, He **didn't** just show up--He was there all along!

- c. I've followed God long enough to know that there are some **nasty** storms--and that it's possible, in them, to have peace within. But you do have to believe God is near, and you do have to hand over your problems to Him.

10. What's grinding you up this morning? What is it, really? Have you declared yourself--decided which team you're really on? Do you have peace with God? If not--that could happen this morning. In fact, **that could happen right now!**

-How about your relationships with others? Who are you at war with? Why don't you just put down your weapons--and make peace? You can, you know. God has revealed Himself as **Yahweh Shalom**--God our peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace is your example--who humbled himself and died on a cross--to make peace. The Spirit of Peace lives in you--offering you all the tools and power you need.

-And to those who are upset--who have a storm raging in their hearts, Jesus said, **My peace I give to you....Come to me you who are weary and burdened down, and I will give you rest for your souls.** Peace and rest can be yours!

-Bottom line? Now it's up to you. But if you're going to still be standing at the end of the day, you'll need **peace**.