

# Tightening Your Belt

Message #3 in the series "Finding Victory in a No-Win World"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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Words. They're the foundation of the human language. They have the power to bring together or the power to isolate. They have the power to hurt, and they have the power to heal. They certainly are used as expressions of love, and they can be used to deceive or to slander. Recently, I asked Dr. Google about what the most common words were used over the past two years of our pandemic. This is a sampling of what Google had in mind.

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|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| ➤ Impeachment          | ➤ Coronavirus       | ➤ Flatten the curve      |
| ➤ Social distancing    | ➤ COVID 19          | ➤ Science                |
| ➤ Cancel Culture       | ➤ Anti-Masker       | ➤ Sanitize               |
| ➤ Self-Isolate         | ➤ Anti-Vaxxer       | ➤ Contactless            |
| ➤ Superspreader        | ➤ Unmute            | ➤ Virtual Happy Hour     |
| ➤ PPE                  | ➤ Systemic Racism   | ➤ Trumpers               |
| ➤ Pandemic             | ➤ Defund            | ➤ Herd Immunity          |
| ➤ Black Lives Matter   | ➤ Quarantine        | ➤ Trauma                 |
| ➤ Remote Learning      | ➤ Contact Tracing   | ➤ Non-Essential Business |
| ➤ Zoom or Zoom bombing | ➤ Panic Shopping    |                          |
|                        | ➤ Essential Workers |                          |

And there were a few new words that were added to the dictionary like doomscrolling. Have you ever heard of that one? That's consuming bad news or information, you know is detrimental to your mental health and yet you can't stop looking. And then there's quaran-cleaning. It's what happens when you start cleaning in order to deal with the isolation of being quarantined. And nomophobia, that's the fear or worry at the idea of being without your phone. And then there's sober-curious. Wow, sober-curious is the idea of experimenting with going without alcohol for any length of time.

It's the power of words. You know, the Apostle Paul understood the power of words. He knew that words had the ability to transform the listener and give strength to the believer. I invite you to listen one more time as we hear those words of Ephesians Chapter 6:10-20 and let's listen for the power of words.

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heaven places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything to stand**

**firm. Stand therefore and fasten the belt of truth around your waist and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak. [Ephesians 6:10-20 NRSV].**

Will you pray with me?

*Gracious God opened us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Father, we pray in Jesus' name. All God's people said, Amen.*

It's been quite a few years, but I remember it like yesterday. Kristine, my wife had a wonderful opportunity for us, and so we traveled down to Memphis, Tennessee. We spent quite a bit of time exploring all of the music dimensions that Memphis had to offer, as well as the food. Got to admit I love their food, but there was one place that I absolutely had to go visit. I had heard about it since I was a child in elementary school. And so, as I stood there overlooking the image of the Lorraine Motel in my mind's eye, I could remember visual images that were long, long embedded in who I had become as an individual over the years. Hearing the voice of Martin Luther King Jr., see, this was the motel, this was the place where he was assassinated. But the interesting thing about his story is that he had gone to Memphis to take a stand and to lead a rally for the sake of sanitation workers. And the evening before he was assassinated, he had an incredible speech. Part of his speech reflected on an assassination attempt of sorts years prior. And he recalled not only that moment, but the potential for what God could do. This speech was prophetic in its own right. A portion of this speech was this, he said, "well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountaintop, and I don't mind like anybody. I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will, and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. And so, I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." The next day Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

Friends, we are at war. We're at war, and that spiritual war has been ongoing not only decades, not only centuries, but for millennia. It's a battle and the battle is ongoing in a spiritual realm between the forces of good, the forces of God Almighty and the forces of the evil one. And the Apostle Paul in Ephesians Chapter 6 brings that battle to the forefront of our thoughts and our minds. And Paul, in his very unique way, is inviting us

to stand in the midst of that battlefield and to remember who we are, and to what we have been called. That mission, that greater purpose of God almighty is to spread the good news. It was the news that was announced in the moment of Jesus's birth. The good news that was celebrated on so many different levels as Jesus took his last breath. For in that moment, victory was won. A victory that very clearly has set the pace and the course for the rest of history. But the enemy of love Satan doesn't take defeat lightly. And so from that moment on to even today, the battle has been waging. And it's a battle that Satan has already lost, and the Church of Jesus Christ needs to remember who they are and to what they have been called.

We have been engaged in a message series that we're calling Finding Victory in a No-Win World. And today I want to take us just a little bit deeper, experiencing the power of words. Words that remind us of what God's great gift and plan has in mind for us. So today, I want to draw us in to yet the next verse of scripture in this wonderful passage. Ephesians Chapter 6 starting at verse 14. Let's listen together as God speaks,

**Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. [Ephesians 6:14 NSRV]**

You know, every time I hear that verse of scripture, I'm drawn back to the Lorraine Motel. I'm drawn back to individuals like Martin Luther King Jr.. Individuals who could stand in the midst of the chaos of our society, the chaos of our life and know beyond a shadow of a doubt who they are and to what they have been called. "Stand therefore..." the Apostle Paul is very clear we don't have to fight this battle. The lure of the enemy, the lure of Satan is to try to get us on to the wrestling match because if he can get us on to the wrestling match thinking that we have to fight using our own power, we will lose, and he knows that. It will cause us to forget that Jesus has already reigned victorious. He's already won. And so, Paul, the Apostle stands in the midst of all of that to remind us of who we are. "Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist..." In Greek, that phrase, "fasten the belt around your waist" is a very interesting phrase. I got to admit it's a little humorous to me because literally, literally that phrase means girdle yourself. I don't know about you, I'm a guy comfortable in my sexuality. I've never put on a girdle. And if you have and you shouldn't have, I don't want to hear about it. Right? But to girdle yourself is really in old ancient language, it's meant to prepare yourself for movement, to prepare yourself.

In literal terms, what I did is to help you visually here is, take a look at **Figure 1**. This visual model describes what that belt looked like for the ancient Roman soldier. Literally without getting too graphic the belt that we're talking about is looking more like an apron and in the front of that belt are straps of



Figure 1 - Armor of God

leather, and they cover, very intentionally, a potentially vulnerable place for the soldier. Do I have to go any more in detail? So, you get the point. So, that's really intentional here, right? So, when you put your belt around you and in spiritual metaphoric language, when you put the belt of truth around you, you are actually protecting yourself from being extra vulnerable. So, let's be honest here with what Paul knows, what we all know, any guy who's ever been in a match where that part of your body has suffered, you understand that your immediate reaction is to double over. The metaphor here is allow the truth, the belt of truth, to protect that which is most vulnerable. That belt is also used as a tool belt. It's the place where your sword is harnessed, is held to your body. That keeps you prepared for the battle. Really critical. The belt is a belt of truth, and that truth is essential for protecting our vulnerable spots.

What is that truth? I'm going to give you just a few quick scripture verses to help shape out the question about truth. Look, for example, at John Chapter 8, Jesus says,

**"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [John 8:31-32 NIV].**

Proverbs 12 17 says,

**"An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies." [Proverbs 12:17 NIV].**

John Chapter 3:21, Jesus is in a conversation with Nicodemus in that grand passage of scripture that many, many people know whether they realize it or not. John 3:16 is one of the most commonly quoted passages from the Bible. This is just a few verses later, Jesus says,

**"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." [John 3:21 NIV].**

Truth exposes lies. Truth exposes everything. A couple more, John 14, Jesus is in the upper room with His disciples closing in on His own arrest, spending the last few moments with His closest friends and He says,

**"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." [John 14:6 NIV].**

Few chapters later, He's in this moment of what we know as the high priestly prayer. He's praying for His disciples, and He says this,

**"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." [John 17:15-17 NIV].**

1 Corinthians 13:6, an amazing passage of scripture where the Apostle Paul is detailing out what love is all about. He says this,

**"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." [1 Corinthians 13 NIV].**

Paul, again in Chapter 4 of Ephesians, writes this,

**"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him, who is the head, that is, Christ." [Ephesians 4:15 NIV].**

And that incredible close friend of Jesus, John the Apostle in writing to the churches in his first letter, he writes this in 1 John:1,

**"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you; God is light; in him, there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." [1 John 1:5-7 NIV].**

What is truth? What the scriptures are teaching us is this, truth comes from our identity in Jesus Christ. It is the apron or belt that holds everything together. That's what truth is it comes it's rooted in our identity in Jesus Christ. So let me give you a working definition of truth. Truth is what Jesus put into you and what Jesus brings out of you. As a follower of Jesus, truth is what Jesus himself puts into you, namely himself. When you say yes to Jesus, Jesus says yes to you and God, gifts to each and every one of us, the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes in us, we have every, every, every ounce of God's gift of grace embedded in us. A new creation takes place, Paul says in 2 Corinthians, a new creation, the old is gone. Behold, the new has come. Truth is what Jesus puts into us. It's also what Jesus brings out of us. That means the truth is for the follower of Jesus, how we from that moment of receiving Jesus and confessing Jesus as our Lord, it is that that moment on where truth begins to show itself and how we love one another, how we treat one another, how we live out the integrity of being a follower of Jesus.

Truth is what Jesus puts in us. And what Jesus brings out of us. But there's more to this verse. Not only do we put on the belt of truth, but we also do something else. We put on the breastplate of righteousness. Words. Powerful words, the word in Greek for put on; it's a very interesting word; for those of you who are lovers of English like I am, this is a word that literally translates being clothed with. It's a verb. That's a participle, and it's in the passive mood, which means the action is being done to us. Literally what we're talking about here is God himself, clothes us, clothes us. With what? With the breastplate of righteousness. Let's bring our model (Figure 1) back. So, the breastplate covers the chest. In Greek, the breastplate is the word thorax. Those of you who are medically minded nurses, doctors, people who just like to play nurse and doctor because you watch hours of those kind of shows on TV, you know - thorax. You may have heard pneumothorax or thoracotomy. Those are all rooted in this Greek word thorax, which means chest or chest cavity. It's where the vital organs of our body are held. And so, the breastplate for the Roman soldier literally covered from the neck down to their waist.

On the front and the back. It was designed to protect, to guard, the heart. That breastplate in spiritual language for Paul, is made of righteousness. Jesus's righteousness.

Listen to a few more passages of scripture that define what we mean, what Paul means by this particular phrase, the breastplate Philipians Chapter 3:7, he says,

**"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." [Philippians 3:7-9 NIV].**

This imagery of the breastplate of righteousness, it's not new to Paul. In fact, it's an image, it's a metaphor that's used in the Old Testament. Isaiah the prophet. This is what we read in Isaiah Chapter 59,

**"The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene. So, his own arm achieved salvation for him and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak." [Isaiah 59:15-17 NIV].**

Powerful Old Testament image. What Paul is saying to us in Ephesians is we are to be clothed with the same breastplate of righteousness that God himself, metaphorically speaking, wore. He is the warrior who stands for justice. In 1 Thessalonians Paul picks up on that theme again in Chapter 5:4, this is what he says,

**"But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer a wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." [1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 NIV].**

Powerful words, words that speak, hope and new life into each and every one of us. It is the power of living in victory, rather than feeling constrained by the battle. We don't have to fight that battle Jesus already has. But we have to equip ourselves to know who we are and whose we are. And every time I read this passage; I keep coming back to this mental image. This is great mental image of immersion baptism. That image

reminds us that we surrender all areas of our lives to God's embrace of grace. Every time we can picture in our minds, immersion baptism, literally the candidate is going completely underwater, right? Completely underwater. That's the total covering of God's grace. Unfortunately, many in our society, many in the church, many of us, we want, in the metaphor, we want certain parts of our lives, to float. Right? There are certain parts of our lives that don't get submerged in that tank of grace. We want to maintain some sense of control. Lord, I'll give you my life, Lord, I'll give you everything. Just don't ask me for this. Or Lord, you can have all of this, I need you, I need your healing, but don't ask this of me. That's part of our human condition. But see, with baptism, we get immersed into the embrace of God's grace and we remember who we are.

In this time of living in a no-win world, it's so easy for us to forget. It's so easy for us to lose track of the truth, and when we lose track of the truth, we become vulnerable. When we lose track of who we are, our heart is exposed to the words and weapons that come at us from the enemy of love. And so, I have a word of advice for all of us. Those darts of the evil one, they come in very creative ways. Sometimes they come at us from clear enemies. Sometimes they come to us from friends who were influenced negatively. Sometimes they come within the church as brothers and sisters' fight. Sometimes they come from us. The darts can damage just like words. So, when the enemy starts attacking you in the area of your brokenness rather than doing what is natural and standing your ground and wanting to fight too defensively. Here's a new principle, how about if we just say, "yes and God. Yes." What do I mean? What if we actually agree with what is said about us? The enemy comes and attacks us and say, "you're good for nothing." What if instead of going, "that's not true." So now we're on the wrestling match. What if we simply go, "you're absolutely right. I am good for nothing. And God took care of that on the cross of Jesus Christ." What if the enemy says, "see, I knew you were a sinner?" What if instead of saying, "No, no, no, no, no, you don't understand," we simply said, "Yes, I am. And God took care of that on the cross. Because in Jesus Christ, I am a new creation. The old is gone. Behold, the new has come." See what I'm doing?

When we fight on our own terms, we will lose. But when we get on to the wrestling match knowing we don't have to fight at all, Jesus has already done that, Jesus has already won. Then we can stand our ground with the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, and the enemy cannot touch us. So let us remember who we are. Let us remember the truth. I want you to recite the following phrases. The phrases that I'm going to give you are scriptural based, recite the actual statement. This is the word of God, and the power of words is designed to heal. Would you say this with me?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ I am wonderfully and fearfully made.</li><li>➤ I am God's workmanship, His masterpiece.</li><li>➤ I am made in the image of God himself. Christ, the hope of glory dwells in me.</li><li>➤ I am thoroughly and completely forgiven.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ I stand clean and innocent before my God, I am redeemed by God, called by name.</li><li>➤ I am a new creation. The old life is gone.</li><li>➤ I am greatly loved by God.</li><li>➤ I am His child.</li><li>➤ I am an heir of God and co-heir with Christ.</li></ul> |
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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ I am one of God's people. A member of His family.</li> <li>➤ I am His treasured possession.</li> <li>➤ I am chosen by God and sealed by His spirit.</li> <li>➤ I am the apple of God's eye. He delights in me.</li> <li>➤ I am more than a conqueror.</li> <li>➤ I am led forth in victory.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ I am a trained soldier, a warrior for Christ.</li> <li>➤ I am the fragrance of Christ. I am a member of His body.</li> <li>➤ I am wanted and I am significant.</li> <li>➤ I am a citizen of God's kingdom.</li> <li>➤ I am sent by God.</li> <li>➤ I am light in the darkness.</li> </ul> |
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Friends, it's time for us to put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness as we go out into the world and to remember always who we are and whose we are. That's the victory that we find in our no-win world. Will you pray with me?

*Gracious, Lord, as individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. have discovered and modeled for us, we go forth out into the world having seen the Promised Land. Yes, Lord, maybe we will see it. We will participate in it one day. But in the meantime, we know by faith who we are called to be. Help us by our lives to tell the story of that promise land. Lead us as your people to the cross of Jesus Christ and allow that Cross of Christ to define who we are and how we live. Thank You for the victory. In Jesus name. And all God's people said, Amen.*