



UNARMED AND DANGEROUS

KEY SCRIPTURES: Romans 7:21-25, Psalm 37:4, Job 22:26, Isaiah 55:10-12a, Ephesians 6:10-18

My pastor was reading about the armor of God, and my first thought was, *I've heard this.*

Do you ever do that? Do you ever read, or have read to you, a passage of scripture that is so familiar that you kind of let your mind wander and go chase some mental rabbits until you hear something new again?

I had been struggling with several things in the days and weeks leading up to that particular Sunday when I thought I could mentally excuse myself from listening closely. Feeling kind of low anyway, I wasn't sure a sermon that made me think of a knight's clanky uniform was really going to help. I was down. Really down. I was losing hope. I was losing joy. Delight was nowhere to be found. And I didn't want to hear about shields and swords and breastplates.

So, I said to myself, *Been there. Done that. Maybe I'll get some help next Sunday.*

A couple days later, knowing I needed to be reading my Bible but not really sure about where I needed to plant myself in its pages, I just opened it up to where my bookmark was. I was trusting—or at least hoping—that the little ribbon marker, which was simply showing me where I had last left off, was also going to show me the way. Some way. Any way.

And guess where it landed! No, it wasn't in Ephesians 6 where my pastor had been reading about putting on my armor. Wouldn't that have been a trip?!

It was Romans 7. Well, there you go. The apostle Paul tells us all about his struggles in Romans 7. What he wants to do, he doesn't do. What he doesn't want to do, that's what he does. Yep, that was me.

Nothing felt like it was going the way it was supposed to. I was walking a walk that I had begun in faith, a career walk in particular, but nothing was working out like I thought it would. The road was lonely, and God was seemingly silent. It had turned out to be so unlike the first part of my

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"...so we can know our value, live with purpose, and make a difference...**In that order.**"



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journey and the steps I had taken at the beginning, when I felt like I was walking so close to Him I could hear Him breathe.

Now, there was no joy. There was little hope, save for the flickering flame that sometimes moved in the breeze of a friend or family member's encouragement. And even though I knew I was supposed to be having the time of my life, I delighted in nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Then, there it was.

"For in my inner being, I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war..." (Romans 7:22). There was more, but that's where I stopped. Two things caught my eye in that one verse, and like a train wreck, all my struggles collided.

The first thing I noticed was the word "delight." At first, I was wondering why He had to bring that up again. Time and again, God had been dealing with me about delighting in Him, but I had lost the know-how. I was beginning to avoid those scriptures altogether, because they were a reminder of what I was unable to do. *"Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart"* (Psalm 37:4). *"Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God"* (Job 22:26). Delight, delight, delight. I felt mocked by the very words that were supposed to bring me comfort.

Then, I read the rest of the verse in Romans 7 and came to the "waging war" part. Tell me about it! It was a daily struggle just to believe there would be any victories to be found. I knew exactly what Paul meant when he talked of war. When once I had gone to bed hardly able to wait until morning light so I could be doing His work again, I had found myself enjoying neither the rest nor the work. It was a battle just to look well-meaning, genuinely interested folks in the eye, and reply, "Fine" to their questions of, "How are you doing? How are things going?"

I knew war. And I felt like I was losing.

Then I went back to the beginning of the verse again. It had struck a chord with me, seeing as how it reopened my wounds. And there I read, *". . .in my inner being."* My inner being. I knew

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that inner being. It was that part of me that was clothed in Christ's righteousness. It was that part of me that had been redeemed by His blood and was now able to communicate with the Father in perfect clarity. That was the real "me." That was the "me" that would be in His presence someday. That "me" knew exactly how to be hopeful and joyful, because it was the only thing about me that was truly real and truly able to connect to God.

That "me" knew exactly what it was to delight in the Lord.

And even though that "me" had also been commissioned, I hadn't seen her in quite a while. She was hunkered down somewhere, feeling beat to a pulp by this war Paul had spoken of.

Then, as He often does, God reminded me of the words I hadn't deemed truly useful at the time, my pastor's words about the armor I was supposed to be wearing. And, as gently but truthfully as He could, He reminded this war-weary soldier that the reason the real "me" was hiding out was because I had been going to war without my armor on.

In the beginning, I had accepted my commission with bravery and honor, and even a great deal of joy. I fought well. Steeped in the Word, praying every time I turned around, I wouldn't go anywhere without knowing I was right where He wanted me to be. And I was delighted! Wow, was I ever! I couldn't stop smiling, and telling everyone about the victories God and I were having together. But then, the battles started getting more intense. I had gotten the attention of the thief—the liar who would now no longer leave me alone. And he threw some pretty good punches.

And slowly, ever so slowly, I had let my pieces of armor fall to the ground. A night here without my Bible open. A day there with hardly a prayer uttered except for the "Help me!" cry of a tired soldier. Eventually, too tired to fight, my armor in a heap beside me, I had rolled up into a little ball and just longed for a day when the enemy would leave me alone and play nice.

And the real "me," left dangerously unarmed, forgot who, and Whose, she was.

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My pastor had given an illustration for the shield of faith mentioned in Ephesians 6:16 that I will never forget. He said that my Savior, Jesus Himself, is standing in front of me, His arms posed in a position of protection. My protection. My faith had put Him there, in front of me. And because I am God's child, my pastor went on to say, Jesus is telling every opposing force, "If you want to get to her, you'll have to go through Me."

It was a beautiful thought, until I realized that I had put Him in the corner with the rest of my armor. And how could I expect Him to help me guard my joy and my hope and my delight in such a place?

God promises this: *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace"* (Isaiah 55:10-12a).

His Word came to me at just the right time. He found me where I was—hiding out in my corner—and reminded me of my need to put on my armor every single day. And right then and there, He lifted me up, dusted me off, buffed out the rust spots on the armor I had neglected, and made me strong for the battle once again.

I have never known God to break a promise. And because of that, I can soldier on. And with my Jesus standing guard in front of me, I'll be back in the battle, back in His Word, and back on my knees. Right where I should have been.

I *"will go out in joy and be led forth in peace"* (Isaiah 55:12a).

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