

# SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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**Overcomer**

**“The Sword of the Spirit”**

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

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When I was a kid one of my favorite books that I had was the Guinness Book of World Records. I was fascinated by all the unbelievable world records. We can now go on the internet and access all the same information at their website. If you were to go to Guinness World Records website and search for the best-selling book of all times you would find these fascinating words, “Although it is impossible to obtain exact figures, there is little doubt that the Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. A survey by the Bible Society concluded that around 2.5 billion copies were printed between 1815 and 1975, but more recent estimates put the number at more than 5 billion. By the end of 1995, combined global sales of *Today's English Version* (Good News) New Testament and Bible (copyright for which is held by the Bible Societies) exceeded 17.75 million copies, and the whole Bible had been translated into 349 languages; 2,123 languages have at least one book of the Bible in that language.” It is interesting to note though that just because a book is a best seller does not mean it is the most read. Sadly, many people own a Bible or several Bibles and seldom if ever open them to read them. Today, we look at our last piece of armor that the Apostle Paul lists that we are to have with us as we strive to follow God in this world and that is the word of God, known here as the sword of the Spirit. Let us listen carefully to God's Word as found in **EPHESIANS 6:10-18**:

## ***Ephesians 6:10-18***

*<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we<sup>[a]</sup> 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.*

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>17</sup> **Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

*<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

## **GOD-BREATHED**

The first thing that we notice in *verse 17* is that the Sword of the Spirit that Paul refers to is the Word of God. It is God speaking to us. There are many ways in the Bible in which God spoke. God's words were powerful beyond reason at the beginning of time that when God spoke, and the universe was created. God spoke through dreams and visions, through a burning bush, through a donkey, through prophets, through a whisper within a person, through angels, and many other creative ways. The most amazing way that God has spoken to us was when God became a human being and lived in this world for a little over 30 years through Jesus, the Son of God whom the Apostle John called the Word. It doesn't get any better than that. Even though Jesus is no longer walking among us in human flesh, God is still among us today through the Holy Spirit within us and speaks to us today through all the means we just listed from the Bible, as well as through the church, through nature, and countless other means. One of the most powerful, reliable ways that God speaks to us today is through the Bible as found in the Old and New Testaments. Who wrote it? Where did it come from? An unknown source wrote this tribute to the Bible saying, "There are words written by kings, by emperors, by princes, by poets, by sages, by philosophers, by fishermen, by statemen, by men learned in the wisdom of Egypt, educated in the schools of Babylon, and trained at the feet of rabbis in Jerusalem. It was written by men in exile, in the desert, in shepherd's tents, in green pastures, and beside still waters. Among its authors we find a tax-gatherer, a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit. We find poor men, rich men, statemen, preachers, captain, legislators judges, and exiles. The Bible is a library full of history, genealogy, ethnology, law, ethics, prophecy, poetry, eloquence, medicine, sanitary scient, political economy, and the perfect rules for personal and social life. And behind every word is the divine author, God Himself."

Somehow God used a wide variety of genres and authors over centuries combined by the church's scrutiny to give us this miraculous book. Paul said about the authorship of the Bible in *2 Timothy 3:16-17*, "*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.* <sup>17</sup> *God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*" In the New International Version, it actually says that it is "God-breathed." Literally the Bible is God speaking to us, plain and simple. Do you remember the famous story about the 6 blind men and the elephant? One blind man touches the belly of the animal and thinks it's a wall. Another grabs the elephant's ear and thinks he's touching a fan. A third blind man touches the tail and thinks he's holding a rope. On they go, each grabbing a part of the elephant without any one of them knowing what it is they really feel. This story is a great description of human inability to know God by our own devices. Someone has to tell these men the truth of who or what it is they are touching. What if in this story the elephant can talk and tell them all about Himself. Thankfully, God does not leave in the dark, but today through the Bible, God reveals Himself to us and more truth than we can handle in a lifetime. The Bible is the best tool that we have to communicate to us, all the truths that we need from God in this life. You could say in a sense like St. Augustine of Hippo said, "The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home."

### ***BENEFITS OF GOD'S WORD***

Paul continues in talking about the armor of God saying that the word of God is like a sword. The word that Paul uses in the Greek language is *machaira* or also called the *gladius* which was specifically a short 2-edged sword that typically measured anywhere from 6 to 18 inches long. A Roman soldier would use this in hand-to-hand combat as a cut-and-thrust sword. It was carried in a sheath or scabbard that was attached to their belts in a convenient place where it was always at hand and ready to be used. Here Paul says it is actually the Spirit's sword, in the Holy Spirit's hands working in and through us. As such, God's Word is a powerful tool for our lives that defends and fights for us in many ways. I read to you earlier Paul's words in *2 Timothy 3:16-17* which tells us that in the hands of the Holy Spirit God uses the Bible to teach us what is true and to help us to realize what is wrong in our lives. Paul even says that the Holy Spirit actually uses God's Word to prepare and equip us to do every good work. The Psalmist adds to this saying in *Psalms 119:105*, "*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*" God uses the Bible like a flashlight to shine light in the midst of a dark world thus guiding our lives in walking in God's truth in all that we do. *Hebrews 4:12* gives another similar analogy of God's Word the Bible when it says <sup>12</sup> "*For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*" The Holy Spirit uses it as a scalpel to do soul surgery to fix our brokenness and heal us from the disease of sin.

We cannot hope to navigate the challenges of life, to become the women and men that God would have us to be without this invaluable book of God. If you were ever affected by a natural disaster such as floods, avalanches, hurricane, tornadoes, earthquakes, or caught in the middle of an emergency situation, or stranded in the wilderness, would you know what to do to survive? Would you know how to treat a snake bite while on a hike? If you were lost in the woods would you know how to make a fire without matches or how to find food? Well, now there are apps to help you with all of these crucial questions. One of them is the SAS Survival Guide iPhone app that took the bestselling book by John "Lofty" Wiseman and put it into digital form. Wiseman was a British soldier of the Special Air Service who wrote a best-selling book on SAS Survival. The app is jam-packed with extremely useful and potentially life-saving information, videos, and other tips and tricks for how to survive when the worst and unexpected happen. The photo galleries show you different animal tracks, medicinal and poisonous plants, sea creatures, and snakes, while the videos show you various instructions. The app also has a comprehensive First Aid section. Do you think you have got what it takes to survive? The Bible is much more than a survival guide, but it does provide the essential information and skills we need to prepare for the crises of this life and for the next.

### ***STUDY & USE IT***

Finally, if we hope to find the full benefit of the word of God in our lives it means that we will need to ***STUDY & USE IT***. If the Bible is all that we have described and more how much more important is it for us to devote ourselves fully to learning and understanding all that is written in it. We need to have that sword on us at all times attached to the belt of truth. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is *Joshua 1:8* where God gives

Joshua this instruction as he begins to lead God's people into the Promised Land, *"Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do."* God is telling Joshua that as he leads the people ahead into this new leg of their adventure in following God it is essential that they immerse themselves in God's truths as found in God's Word. They cannot make it without hearing God speak to them through the Bible. We have all kinds of opportunities that we can easily avail ourselves in learning and understanding all that God is saying in the Bible: daily reading portions of the Bible, using devotionals and other books that help us to understand the Bible, studying the Bible with others in our church such as Sunday School, or other study groups or classes, or joining a Life Group, a small group that studies the Bible together, and also regularly attending worship services where we are hopefully hearing God speak to us through the sermons, and the list can go on.

Notice that the sword does us no good just having it on us at all times. We have to take the sword out of the sheath as needed and use it in life's struggles and in ourselves. I heard a really great quote from John C. Maxwell this week where he says, "Wisdom is knowing the right path to take. Integrity is taking it." As God told Joshua in *Joshua 1:8* that not only are they to meditate on the Bible, but they are also to obey everything written in it. Just knowing the truths of the Bible is not enough. We are called to use the truths in every area of our lives. When Jesus began His ministry with fasting and praying in the wilderness for 40 days, the devil, the unseen enemy tempted Jesus numerous times. On one occasion when Jesus must have been unbelievably hungry, *Matthew 4:3-4* tells us that this happened, *"<sup>3</sup> During that time the devil came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.' <sup>4</sup> But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* When Jesus faced struggles, He knew the truths in God's Word from His own studies and Jesus also used the truths to win the battles. Jesus knew the truths of the Bible and He followed its instructions to the letter. Have you ever watched professional golfers and been awed by their ability to land a shot from 200 yards away just a few yards from the hole? Do they have an internal GPS system that enables them to guess the distances on the course with uncanny accuracy? Not really. What they have is a yardage book. A yardage book is a map of each hole on the course that gives distances from various landmarks on the hole to the green. Decades ago, Arnold Palmer and his caddy began drawing rough yardage charts with little pictures of trees, fairways, greens, sand traps and such of the various holes on all the courses they played. Jack Nicklaus was the pro who really made yardage books popular. Today along with the maps many pro golfers will keep what essentially is a personal journal of how they have played each hole of the course, what clubs they have used from various distances, what the wind was doing, and so on, and what happened to their shots. Golfers swear by their yardage books. For example, Zach Johnson, winner of the 2010 Colonial, says, "I feel naked without it out there. It's my golf bible." One former caddie, George Lucas, has made a business out of driving the country and charting distances of some 1,000 golf courses and publishing his data in a book that is now available to the public. The Bible may not give us specific guidance for every decision we make in life but has given us in the Bible principles and truths that we can

apply to an endless number of situations we face in life and if we will learn its truths and then live by them it will make all the difference in how we will face the countless challenges of life.

We can rest assured that God is not playing hide and seek with us by withholding who He is and His truth. God has gone to the great length possible to reveal Himself to us and His truths when Jesus, the Word, came into this world.

Icebreaker I – What was your favorite book as a kid? What book(s) are you currently reading?

Icebreaker II – How many Bibles, if any, do you have in your home? Do you prefer physical Bibles or digital? Which version is your favorite?

1. Do you spend time reading God's Word daily? Weekly? Only during Lent, on Easter or Christmas?
2. Why do you think Paul chose to associate God's Word with this a weapon?
3. The sword is an offensive weapon. Everything else in your armor is designed to hold you steady from what the enemy seeks to bring against you. God has given you an additional weapon with which you can attack and advance. How does your mind-set change when you are given a weapon with which to attack rather than just defend?
4. What adjectives would you use to describe how a soldier would feel going into battle without a sword?
5. How does a Roman soldier's sword help us understand how to use the Bible to win our spiritual battles?
6. Swords are used for close combat, not long-range warfare. Could this imply the nature of the battle a Christian fights?
7. What is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge with regard to God's Word?
8. When we speak God's word under the urging of the Holy Spirit into a situation in our lives, we begin to take ground in the spiritual realm. What is one area of your life where grounds need to be taken? What is the Word (the Sword) that you could use / are using?
9. How can this group pray for you this week?