



YOUR REAL OPPONENT

SPIRITUAL WARFARE [WHO IS OUT TO GET ME?]

THE HURDLE

I've always been a competitive athlete and now I'm a Christian, but lately I've become more unsettled with how I've been influenced to think and act as an athlete. If I'm honest, a lot of my thoughts are layered with stress, anger, bitterness—toward my coaches, the other team, the refs, sometimes even myself. The relentless pressure to perform leaves me wondering if I'm measuring up, consuming me with what others think of me. I know I'm supposed to love God and others, but that's probably impossible in sports. Sometimes I think, "Don't just play hard. Kill 'em!" or "You're an idiot for missing that play" or "We lose this game and our season is nothing." Something just doesn't seem right with all of it. I want to do right by God and sports but there sure seems to be a lot of negative stuff that just passes for 'normal' in the athletic world. Where does all that junk come from?

Do you ever experience thoughts or feelings of discouragement, an inner "voice" that says "You're not good enough as a player or person so you might as well give up?" When or why?

Can you describe a situation where you or your teammates griped about others or each other, causing division, distrust and factions?

Do anger and revenge fuel your life more than love and gratitude? Explain.

“

Warfare is one thing: it is a philosophy of deception.

Sun Tzu
Chinese Military General

”

As crazy as it may sound, there is a spiritual world where battles are currently being fought. The situations discussed above are settings for what the Bible calls "spiritual warfare." You may be surprised to learn that you have spiritual enemies who are committed to ruining your life.

I HEAR YA

The bible is full of people who experienced the challenge of this warfare ...

Adam and Eve: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1-2)

David: Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Jesus: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

The Early Church: "Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so that they are unable to see the glorious light of the good news that is shining upon them." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Satan wants you to despise yourself so that you don't experience God's love for you. He divides and conquers, creating division so that God's people are not unified. He deceives people into thinking that his way (the world's way) is the best.

These are subtle but specific strategies of Satan, an invisible spiritual opponent of God and his followers. Failure to see or believe in him does not hinder him from messing with your life.

LISTEN UP

Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

1. In verse 12, what words are used to describe our spiritual enemy?
2. God commands us to put on the full armor of God, to suit up and be prepared to face our opponent. What is the purpose of armor in battle? What happens if you fail to suit up?
3. Ephesians 6:14-17 describes the “armor of God” provided for every Christian. Look at the chart below. Write a simple definition or synonym for each piece of armor, then consider its opposite under “Strategies of Satan”.

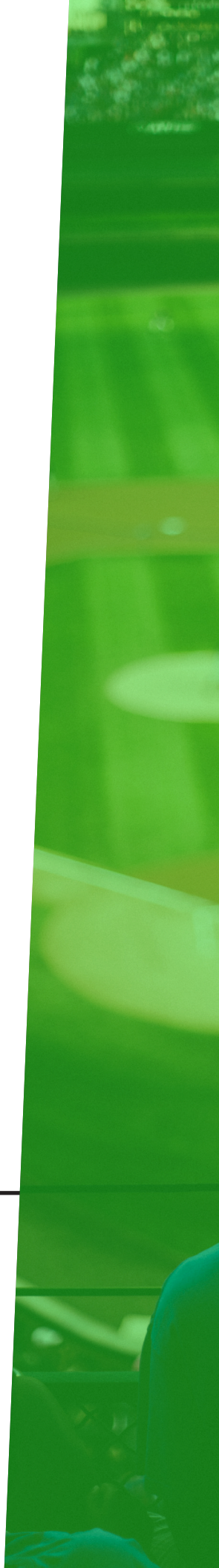
Armor of God	Definition	Strategies of Satan
Truth		
Righteousness		
Peace		
Faith		
Salvation		
Word of God		

4. Equipped with the “Armor of God,” what does it mean for you to “stand” (v. 11, 13, 14) against Satan?
5. The nature of competitive sports today provides tremendous opportunities for Satan and his army to attack. Can you identify situations in your sport experience where this true?

FOR THE RECORD

God is not surprised that at times we gravitate back to our old habits of thinking and acting, especially since Satan tempts us to do so. But when Jesus died on the cross, he broke the power of Satan and opened a door for us to live free of his control—not free of his influence or temptations, but free to choose Life instead of Death. God leaves us in a world system

currently controlled by Satan, surrounded by people in rebellion to the things of God—but he does not leave us alone! He gives us a salvation that sets us free; a true righteousness we don’t have to earn; a peace that knows He is in control, His Word which tells us the truth, and faith to stand strong against doubt. So suit up!



YOUR MOVE

1. If you were Satan, how would you attack you?
What areas in your life would you target:
negative thoughts about self, doubting God,
lack of discipline with your body, anger toward
others, destructive habits, apathy, etc?

“
There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.
”

C.S. Lewis
Author/Professor

2. As you understand your vulnerabilities, identify one or two pieces of armor that would directly combat those areas. For example, if you are taking advice from a teammate that perpetuates retaliation toward others, begin to trust God's Word as the highest standard for living, and instead offer compassion and forgiveness.

Weakness:

Armor:

Weakness:

Armor:

3. Begin to pray Warfare Prayers. You might pray something like this: “God, You are Lord of my life and Satan can no longer use _____ to maintain dominance over me. I will put on my armor each day and trust You to fight my battles. I take my stand with You and accept the authority you've given to me. Thank you for the power to resist the schemes of Satan in my life!” Consider writing your own and keep it with you.

Prayer is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God ... It is for those on active duty.

John Piper
Pastor/Author

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to grow stronger in battle against the enemy of your soul.

AS YOU ENTER

“WE DON’T WANT SATAN TO WIN ANY VICTORY HERE, AND WELL WE KNOW HIS METHODS!” (2 CORINTHIANS 2:11).

Know Your Enemy

Deception- Satan is called a liar, the father of lies (John 8:44), clouding people from the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is also called the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9) and an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), looks good but evil on the inside.

Division- Divide and conquer is an old military strategy because a unified front is much more difficult to defeat. Anger, slander, and unforgiveness break relationships. (Ephesians 4:25-31)

Fear- of the unknown, fear of failure or a fear of engagement with the enemy, Satan uses to his advantage. Christ has stripped him and his demonic hoard of their power. (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15)

Temptation and Enslavement- Satan wants to enslave us to sin or destructive thoughts (2 Peter 2:18-19). Temptation leads to sin which leads to shame which leads to cover up.

Guilt & Shame- Satan will address sin by accusations (called “the accuser”, see Zechariah 3:1). He says, “You are such a hypocrite, such a loser. You call yourself a Christian?” The cross has freed us from guilt and shame so that we have forgiveness and hope.

Fight in God’s Strength

Power Source: Word and Prayer - Ephesians 6:13-18 remind us that the Word and prayer are what’s needed to constantly sustain our life in order to be clear-headed and prepared for Satanic attacks. The simplest way to explain those two commands is to so saturate yourself in the Bible so that your thoughts and your prayers begin to take on the perspective and desires of God. “Prayer is foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons.”

Power Realized: Authority of Jesus - The primary aim of the cross was not only to save us but also to defeat Satan. We see Jesus driving out the cosmic murderer (John 8:44; 12:31), destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), disarming “rulers and authorities” (Colossians 2:15) and rendering powerless the devil (Hebrews 2:14). He gives us that authority and outfits us with power to continue expanding His kingdom and engaging the brokenness of this world.

Sample Warfare Prayers

Read a passage and pray back to God in your own words.

2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

James 4:3-8

I Peter 5:6-10

I Peter 2:9-12

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

AS YOU LEAVE

- » REMEMBER CHRIST’S DEATH AND RESURRECTION DEFEATED SATAN ONCE AND FOR ALL.
- » STAND FIRM IN THE SPIRITUAL ARMOR THAT GOD PROVIDES.