

August 22, 2021

Texts: Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-18; Ephesians 6: 10-20

Title: "Beating the Stress Tests of Life"

If you have ever spent any time in an airport then you know how crazy things can be. You've got the security checks, the matching up of thousands of pieces of baggage with the right people, airline schedules and weather conditions. It's pretty incredible that millions of people are flying all over every day with as few problems as there are. How do airports do it? Well, did you know that before a major airport opens, it has to undergo a stress test?

An airport stress test is like a dress rehearsal for opening night for a Broadway show. I read an article recently about all the testing prior to the opening of a new airport last October in Berlin, Germany. What you see are volunteers who were asked to go through the whole process of acting as if they were taking a flight. Some waited at the ticket counters and check baggage. They went through security. They bought overpriced food and magazines and they checked the message boards to confirm flights.

In order to prepare the employees for the inevitable problems that would come up, they secretly arranged for some to happen. Certain passengers were asked to act like spoiled, high-maintenance VIPs. Flights got canceled at the last minute. Hundreds of bags got re-routed to another airport. A security scanner suffered a glitch. All these problems were staged to see how the employees would handle them. Would they rise to the challenge? Or would they react in anger, lashing out at the passengers?

How do you think you would do? Maybe you're getting a headache just thinking about it? I want to ask you this: What if you could do a dress rehearsal that would prepare you for the challenges and heartbreaks and battles of life?

Two weeks ago, I talked about a passage from Ephesians 4, and how the apostle Paul was trying to create this new kind of community called "the church" that was based on equality and sacrificial love, something that had never been created before. In today's reading, Paul's writing to them about what they need to deal with the stressful problems they faced. Remember, the early church had to put up with a lot of hostility from those around them including the Roman government. How would they face these problems without losing their faith?

Paul uses the metaphor of the putting on of a suit of armor to get his message across. "Put on the full armor of God..." he writes, "so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day...to stand firm."

So the first step, according to Paul, in facing down any challenge is to learn to depend on God. It's possible to declare faith in God and yet, to live as if the only power we have to draw on is our own. Friends, if that be the case, we'll be whipped before the battle ever starts.

There's a scene in the Old Testament in which David, the young shepherd is going out to face the giant Goliath. Saul, the king, places upon David his own armor—his breastplate, his sword, his helmet. One version of the Scripture says, "David tried in vain to go." Saul's armor was too heavy! The little fellow couldn't move! So, David took Saul's armor off and went out to face Goliath with only his

faith in God, God's armor. "You come at me with sword and shield," he says to Goliath, "but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Israel. He'll give me the victory." And you know the outcome.

I wish that every one of us could go out and face the world wearing the armor of God! The difference in our lives would be extraordinary. Young people at school, as well as men and women on the job—battling temptation—overcoming discouragement—standing up to the bullies of this world. I wish everyone here could leave here walking in the confidence that the unseen strength and power of God is going with us.

So be more intentional about depending on God and then ask God to give you courage and confidence. Confidence and courage make such a difference in life. Verses 14-17 in our passage reads like this, "Stand firm" wearing the "belt of truth" around your waist and the "breastplate of righteousness." Don't forget the "shield of faith," the "helmet of salvation," and "the sword of the Spirit," which is the word of God.

Effectiveness in life so often is determined by the twin qualities of courage and confidence. But where do they come from? Where do you get it? From basing your life on the truth of God and the character of God. When you trust in God to lead you in wisdom, truth and power each day, obstacles become opportunities to grow in your faith. Challenges become opportunities to grow in wisdom. Wear that armor friends. And when you do you will act with wisdom, character and courage in spite anything that would challenge you.

When Pastor Bruce Larson was a boy, his family attended a big Presbyterian church in downtown Chicago, Illinois. Larson says that his favorite moment in the worship service was when the ushers passed the offering plate. The ushers in his childhood church were some of the most prominent businessmen and professional leaders in Chicago. But there was one particular usher who stood out to young Bruce Larson. Bruce's father pointed him out each week to make sure little Bruce understood what an important man he was.

This very special usher in Bruce Larson's childhood church was a man named Frank Loesch. During the Prohibition Era of 1920 to 1933, criminal gangs rose to power in many major American cities. And few gangsters were as powerful or as feared as Al Capone. Even the FBI was afraid to stand up to Capone.

But Frank Loesch, an elderly attorney, established the Chicago Crime Commission to clean up corruption in Chicago politics and break Capone's criminal organization. Loesch knew that his work would put him in danger. Many police, public officials and judges in Chicago were either on Capone's payroll, or they were in fear for their lives if they opposed him. Loesch, his family and friends were the targets of numerous death threats. But Loesch's faith wouldn't let him sit by quietly and let criminals and corrupt politicians do their thing. It was his great courage and perseverance that eventually led to Al Capone's arrest. Bruce Larson's dad never let a Sunday go by without pointing proudly to the elderly church usher who stood up to one of America's most feared gangsters. So the secret to dealing with any challenge is to learn to depend on God where we

find our strength, our courage and our confidence.

Finally, we must prepare ourselves daily by opening to the power and the presence of God. That's how we get the armor of God and beat the stress tests of life. Verses 18-20 read, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Prayer. The power of prayer.

That's exactly what the armor of God and prayer do for you us. They make us complete, they point us in the right direction, and they equip us for battle. But we have to prepare ourselves every day by prayer, by reading our Bible, by spending time in aligning with the mind of Jesus Christ. We all face suffering, challenges battles of various kinds and God doesn't keep from them all. But He does this. He equips us for the journey. But as always we have to do our part and part of that is to simply say "yes" to God.

There is nothing you cannot overcome if you rely on the strength, courage and confidence that come from your relationship with God. Amen.