

“Be strong in His mighty power.”

One bright, beautiful Sunday morning, everyone in a tiny village wakes up early and goes to their local church. Before the service starts, the townspeople sit in their pews and talk about their lives and their families. Suddenly, at the altar, Satan appears! Everyone starts screaming and running for the front entrance, trampling each other in their determined efforts to get away from Evil Incarnate. Soon, everyone is evacuated from the church except for one old man, who sat calmly in his pew, seemingly oblivious to the fact that God’s ultimate enemy is in his presence. This confuses Satan a bit and so he walks up to the man and says, ‘Hey, don’t you know who I am?’ The man says, ‘Yep, sure do.’ Satan says, ‘Well, aren’t you afraid of me?’ The man says, ‘Nope, sure ain’t.’ Satan, troubled, says, ‘and why aren’t you afraid of me?’ The man says, ‘Well, I’ve been married to your sister for 25 years.’

And I’m wondering if you would recognise Satan if he showed up in your life? The apostle Paul began this wonderful letter to the Ephesians by reminding them that before the creation of the world, God established His plan to create a single new human race through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He then went on to remind them in **Ephesians 2** that God completed that plan through Christ and now all people, which includes the Gentiles are united in peace and unity under Christ. In **Ephesians 3** he talked about how they should develop that unity with love for one another and in the way they live. In **Ephesians 4** he wrote about how God has gifted and equipped the church to help develop that unity as we grow to maturity in Christ. And in **Ephesians 5** Paul encourages us to strive for that unity as a church which involves not just unity in a group, but also unity in our personal relationships.

In other words Paul was urging the church to be united, be united even in the midst of diversity. **And wouldn’t it be a wonderful testimony to the world if we could only be united? Wouldn’t it be so uplifting if the world knew we were Christians simply because of our love for one another?**

Paul is talking about the ideal which all Christians should strive for but as we enter **Ephesians 6** Paul is going to talk about the reality. He’s going to bring us back down to planet earth with a thud and that’s because just like us, Paul lived in the real world. **And what is the world in which we live in?** It’s a fallen world, a world full of sin and a world that’s opposed to God.

That’s why Paul prayed in **Ephesians 3:14-19** “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

He prayed that prayer because he knew how difficult it was going to be for the church to achieve that goal of unity and faithfulness. And if we are to be honest with ourselves as a church, we would soon realise that it is so hard to reach that goal, never mind maintain it. And that’s because the church is made up of people, people with different backgrounds, personalities, cultures and sometimes people come along with their religious baggage.

**When I was in the US last year I spoke to a number of people who were worried about the threat of denominationalism. Now my response to that, is that denominationalism isn’t our biggest threat, the biggest threat is from within the church itself.**

Yes Paul says in **Ephesians 6:16** “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” But let me tell you loved ones, the arrows which Satan fires from the inside do a lot more damage than the ones he fires at us from the outside.

The true threat is that we all face opposition from the spiritual forces around us. And until we admit that each of us are weak, until we admit that each of us finds it hard to fully obey God at times, even when we try our best. Until we admit that we really are involved in spiritual warfare and we have an enemy who doesn’t want unity but division. Until we admit these things are real and a real danger to the church and ourselves as individuals, we will never be able to achieve that goal of unity.

Paul began his letter by writing in **Ephesians 1:1** “To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Did you know that at this very moment you are in two places at the same time? You are here physically in Liverpool but spiritually you are in Christ.

**Ephesians 1:3** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” So how do we know that there is a heavenly or spiritual realm? Some people say, if they cannot see it, they can’t believe in it.

Many people including Christians don’t want to deal with a world they cannot see because they struggle enough in the world they can see. But loved ones, before we can talk about spiritual warfare, we first need to believe that the heavenly realms exist. We treat the spiritual side of Christianity like the child who goes to bed at night. They get into bed and close their eyes, they cover their heads with a blanket thinking that no one can see them. But loved ones, just because we can’t see the heavenly realms doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.

You may remember what happened on the **11<sup>th</sup> March 2011**. The nuclear plant at **Fukushima** had a major breakdown and there was radioactive gases leaking into the atmosphere. Now the gases didn’t give off any smell and you couldn’t visibly see the gas with the naked eye. The company tried to cover up the incident, but people were dying, people were being diagnosed with cancer and other life threatening diseases and **160,000 people** ended up fleeing from their homes.

Now my point is this, if you choose to ignore the reality of the heavenly realms just because you can’t see it or smell it, you do so at your own peril. How else can you explain why so many people are confused about Christ in the world today? How else can you explain why so many Christians fight with each other? How else can you explain why there are so many people angry with a God they don’t even believe in?

Christian you are at war, it’s a spiritual war and when you became a Christian you signed up for spiritual warfare against our enemy the devil. And let me tell you loved ones, there’s not going to be any peace talks, so we need to be ready to fight and defend ourselves and our unity.

Peter tells us in **1 Peter 5:8+9** “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

Paul tells us in **Ephesians 6:12** “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Our theme is ‘**soldiers of Christ arise,**’ maybe the theme should be ‘**soldiers of Christ awake**’ Wake up Christian and do what our commanding officer Jesus asked us to do, fight. Paul doesn’t go into detail about who these evil forces are, but he does warn us of their evil intentions. They want to frustrate God’s plans, if God’s plan is for unity among His people, then they want to do whatever they can to cause division.

God, through the death of Jesus Christ, broke down the dividing wall of hostility between all people regardless of gender, age, race, or culture but the devil and his agents are trying to raise them up again. God wants His church to live together in harmony and in purity but the devil and his agents want to make sure that won’t happen.

And so we must fight, we must never stop fighting the temptation to sin and never stop fighting for unity. Yes we fail sometimes, yes we let God down sometimes, and yes the world will hate us but don’t stop fighting. Because this fight has been going on even before the creation of the world.

**Isaiah 14:12-14** “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”

While this passage is referring specifically to the king of Babylon, it also a reference to the spiritual power behind this king, namely, Satan. Do you remember what Satan said to Eve in the garden?

Genesis 3:4+5 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The point I’m trying to make is that this spiritual battle is going to keep on going until our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ comes back to take us home. There are rulers and authorities; there are cosmic powers at work in this present darkness.

They have a certain power in this created world that hasn’t yet been taken away from them. Christ has won the victory but they continue to fight, and will continue to do so with more and more desperation, until the last day. In other words, the reality is that we’re opposed by the spiritual forces of evil, whose desire is to conquer us, rule us, and ultimately lead us astray from following the Christ.

Now remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees concerning the devil in John 8. John 8:44 “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

The devil is the father of lies, he did it with Eve in the garden and he’s still doing it today. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:14 “For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” In other words, if one strategy isn’t working on us, he’ll try another. And of course one of his greatest strategies in this day and age is to convince people that he doesn’t even exist. And so if you don’t believe in the devil, you won’t be worried about his lies and temptations, will you? Don’t be fooled loved ones, the devil is real, all you have to do is look at what’s happening in the world today, or even look at what’s happened and continues to happen within the Lord’s church today.

Now let’s address our text for today, Ephesians 6:10 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

I love that story about the young man who is watching his favourite TV show one night when his younger sister comes in and switches channels. He said to her, ‘what makes you think that you can just come in here and switch channels?’ She lifted up her hand and said, ‘these five fingers are nothing when they are opened, but when they come together they are a powerful weapon to behold.’ To which the young man submitted and let her watch whatever she wanted.

I believe that one of the main reasons so many Christians fail and fall away is because they are trying to fight on their own. Some Christians are so confident in themselves that they don’t bother to ask God for His help. They just assume that they can go through life victorious over all the temptations that the devil throws at them. And there are other Christians who are still asleep and don’t participate in the battle. And some Christians spend too much time in the world and not enough time in the Lord.

You see, Paul says we are to ‘be strong in the Lord and His mighty power’. What comes to you mind when you read those words? I’ll tell you what comes to my mind, I can’t fight this fight on my own. The power and strength I need to fight this fight can only come when I realise that it is God who is the source of that strength and power.

Remember what Jesus said in John 15:1-5 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jesus says, apart from Him we can accomplish nothing at all. If you’re trying to fight the good fight against the spiritual forces of darkness on your own, Jesus says you’re like a branch which has been cut off from the vine. But if you’re fighting whilst staying close to the Lord, the Lord will help you fight.

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” 2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

You see loved ones, as human beings we get tired very easily and very quickly but the Lord’s mighty power is infinite.

It was by His own strength that He not only created the heavens and the earth, but caused the mountains to tremble, and the rocks to melt. It was God's own strength that drove back the River Jordan, the cedars of Lebanon to be broken in pieces, and the forests to be stripped bare.

Paul wrote earlier in **Ephesians 1:20** it was His strength that caused Jesus to be raised from the dead. He also said in **Ephesians 2:1-5** it was by His strength that all Christians were made alive after being dead in sin. Paul is saying, **'I want to encourage you all to find your source of power in the Lord and in the strength of His might.'**

Paul is not dealing with some fancy ideas here, he's dealing with the power of God which has been demonstrated time and time again throughout history. In the Old Testament, whenever God promised the children of Israel that He would perform a marvellous work, He would remind them of the great and mighty power He displayed when He delivered them from their Egyptian bondage.

**Exodus 32:11 "But Moses sought the favour of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"**

**Deuteronomy 4:34 "Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?"**

Whenever Israel faced oppression, perilous times, or even annihilation, God would remind them of how He delivered them from Pharaoh and their Egyptian bondage. In other words, Israel could count on God to step-in on their behalf and every time they forgot that, God would remind them once again.

Up to the Exodus, God was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but after the Exodus God was known as the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt with His mighty hand. And so in effect that deliverance from Egypt through God's mighty power was to stand almost as a benchmark for generations to come.

**But what is the benchmark in the New Testament? Romans 1:2-4 "The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."**

The new benchmark in the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. **And how often should we remember this new benchmark?** Every Lord's Day, that's why we partake in the Lord's Supper, to remember the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, because God has the strength and might to raise Jesus from the dead, He certainly has the strength and might to help us in our spiritual battle. You see loved ones, God wants us to be strong in Him because we are in a spiritual battle against the powerful forces of darkness and we can't win on our own.

**I remember being told a story about a boxer who was getting beaten up pretty badly in the ring and when the bell went, he said to his trainer, 'I'm getting killed out there, please throw in the towel'. His trainer said, 'oh no you're doing great, that guy is hardly hitting you'. To which the boxer said, 'well can you keep an eye on the referee because someone is hitting me hard out there.'**

We're fighting against things we can't see and don't really understand. Let's look at **Ephesians 6:12** again **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."**

The battles we face every day comes at us in different ways. Some Christians struggle against sexual temptation, or serious illness. Some Christians struggle against the loss of a loved one or being hated by others. Some Christians struggle against covetousness, or addictions like alcohol, drugs or pornography. Some Christians struggle against things like pride or their temper.

Now please don't misunderstand me here, I'm not saying that the devil makes you sick or makes you steal food from a shop. But what I am saying is that there are spiritual forces which are ready to tempt you to do these things, they are ready to catch us out in our moments of weakness. **Why?** Because they want you to fall, they want you leave Christ.

Satan and his followers are trying to steal your joy and your effectiveness as a witness for Christ but remember they can't steal your salvation. That's why we have the helmet of salvation, the reassurance in our minds that our salvation is secure. And so when Paul talks about **'Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power'**, he knew exactly what he was talking about.

Remember what he wrote back in Ephesians 3? Ephesians 3:20 **"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."** Where is that power supposed to be at work? In us! That's why James could write in James 4:7 **"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** Now we've all pictured ourselves running away from Satan, but have you ever pictured Satan running away from us? James says that all Christians have got the power to make that happen.

Loved ones, being strong in the Lord is the only way you will ever be able to resist the devil. We're not fighting frail old men who have physical or mental difficulties, we're fighting an innumerable host of fallen angels. They are the ones who are in control of the world of ignorance, sin, and sadness. And when we fight, we must be strong in the Lord and fight the battle with spiritual weapons. Let me show you three examples about what I'm talking about from the Old Testament.

Now we all know according to 2 Chronicles 9:22-26 that Solomon who was the wisest of all men, had great wealth and great power. We also know according to Judges 15:16 and Judges 16:30 that Samson was the strongest of all men and he killed 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey and he toppled a temple with his own hands. We also know that David was gifted with devotion and he loved the Lord and pursued to honour and glorify God as we can read in many of the Psalms.

Now what's my point? My point is that even though that all three men were strong and had great power, they all fell. All three fell, despite of their own strengths, they were no match for the schemes of the Devil. Satan, in his evil plan led Solomon to marry many foreign women and through them he fell to the temptation to serve false gods according to 1 Kings 11:1-3. Samson, as strong as he was, was unable to resist the persistence of a woman. Delilah hounded him into telling the secret of his strength, and through her betrayal, he ultimately fell according to Judges 16:19. David also fell into the temptation of lust, then adultery, then murder as you can read for yourself in 2 Samuel 11:11-27.

Loved ones, are we any stronger than Solomon, Samson or David? We need to rely on God's power alone, but we also need to put on the armour of God so we can stand firm ourselves. Now notice that the instruction is to **stand**, it's the Greek word, **'histemi'**. Now this is an interesting word because Paul uses it in Ephesians 6:11+13+14. And it implies that the battle we are engaged in, isn't a battle where we're on the attack but rather the image is that of a siege, where we're defending a position.

And so Paul is saying that the church is under attack from the outside and our task is to defend the church from that attack. In other words we are to stand firm so the attacker can't get in and cause mayhem in our midst. We're being attacked on all sides by those who want to shake our faith and confidence in Christ Jesus.

But whose strength and mighty power are we supposed to rely on to fight this battle? God's strength, God's mighty power, not our own. And it's only when we totally rely on His strength and in His mighty power can any of us truly stand firm.

Now the good news is that God knows when we engage in this battle we are going to need weapons and so He equips us with everything we need and more. Ephesians 6:11 **"Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"**. Now I'm not going to deal with each element of the armour because someone else will be teaching on them. But the armour Paul is talking about isn't just any armour, it's God's armour.

It's a bit like the ritual that's gone through before each Commonwealth or Olympic games where all the athletes go and get measured up for their uniforms. They don't wear their own, or their local club's or their counties uniform, they're provided with a new uniform that identifies them as British athletes.

And it's the same with us, we don't stand in our own strength, nor do we wear our own uniforms. Rather we wear the uniform, the armour that God provides, that both carries the power of God, and identifies us as part of God's team.



Now I mentioned that God equips us with every spiritual weapon we will ever need but we also need to remember that He provides so much more for our battle. When we're studying with people, we're very good at pointing out to them that **Acts 2:38** says, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."**

But loved ones we are not giving the potential Christian any help by missing out the rest of that verse. **Acts 2:38** **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** We're given the gift of Holy Spirit Himself because God knew we were going to need all the help we can get to fight this spiritual battle.

The Holy Spirit wants to help us produce evidence that He is living in us. **Galatians 5:22-26** **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."** The Holy Spirit wants us to look like Jesus, sound like Jesus and act like Jesus and He wants to help us in our spiritual battle against these evil forces.

**Romans 8:26+27** **"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."** The Holy Spirit wants to help us when we are weak and tired and He will speak for us when we don't know what to say to God in prayer.

In **Revelation 2+3** when Jesus writes to the seven churches of Asia Minor, Jesus says at the end of each letter, **"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** I wonder what the Holy Spirit says to us today? I believe if the Holy Spirit was to write a letter to the churches today, he would say three things. **1.** Believe in Me. **2.** Use Me. **3.** Let Me use you.

So not only do we have the full armour of God, and the Holy Spirit to help us in this battle, we also have the assistance of angels, which is almost always ignored or overlooked. We're going through a study of the **Book of Hebrews** at the moment at Great Barr and we've spent a lot of time discussing angels.

And it's amazing how active these spiritual messengers have been throughout the entire Bible and how even today they are still very active. **And how do I know they are still very active today?** The Hebrew writer asks the question in **Hebrews 1:14** **"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"** This verse reveals their ministry to be two-fold. They are **'ministering spirits'**, sent forth to serve **'those who will inherit salvation.'** They are also **'serving spirits'** which speaks of their service to God Himself. The word **'diakonia'** which is rendered **'to serve'**, describes the nature of their service to believers.

**But who are they serving loved ones?** They are serving **'those who will inherit salvation'**, and that means you and me. **Do I believe in guardian angels?** Yes I do. And if you ask **if I can recognize a 'guardian angel'?** I answer, no. But that's not a problem for me, after all, on several occasions Abraham in the Old Testament and Peter in the New Testament did not recognize them either.

In any case, the recognition of God's children is the job of the angel, since he is to minister for those who will inherit salvation. It is not necessary for me to be able to recognize him, but he is commissioned to recognize me.

**How do the angels go about their work?** That is for them to know but we, just like what we have to do concerning the spiritual realms, are to have faith in their existence and in our heavenly Father's promised care for His people.

We see an example of their work after Jesus was in spiritual warfare with Satan in **Matthew 4**. **Matthew 4:11** **"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."** **Do you not believe the words of Johnson Oatman, Jr. who wrote the hymn 'count your blessings'?** The last stanza says, **'So, amid the conflict whether great or small, Do not be disheartened, God is over all; Count your many blessings, angels will attend, Help and comfort give you to your journey's end'.** If you don't believe in angels or that they are not actively trying to help you get to heaven, **then why do you sing the song?**

So not only do we have the full armour of God, and the Holy Spirit and the assistance of angels, to help us in this battle, we also have the example of others who have already fought this fight in faith. In **Hebrews 11** we have that long list of the faithful heroes who demonstrated how to live by faith.

And **Hebrews 12:1-3** says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Who are those witnesses mentioned in verse 1?

They are all the people mentioned in **Hebrews 11**, in other words these are all the people of old who ran the race and fought the good fight. Think of the Olympics, and a huge stadium, think of the audience as those who have already run the race, think of them in the heavenly places just cheering us on.

Their faithfulness is our encouragement because they were able to run the race and finish. And remember the whole object of running a race is to finish the race. It was **John Stephen Akhwari** who fell badly wounding his knee and dislocated that joint plus his shoulder hit hard against the pavement whilst running the marathon in the **Mexico City Olympics** in 1968. And despite everyone else finishing hours before him, he kept on going and when a reporter asked him why, he famously replied, ‘My country did not send me here to start the race, but to finish it.’

And loved ones, God didn’t just ask us to fight this fight well and run the race well, He asks us to run the race in such a way that you will be able to finish it. The Hebrew writer says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders”. The original runners in the Olympics were men only and they ran naked, for the purpose of being lighter, so that nothing would hinder their race whilst they were running.

So let me ask you, what things are weighing you down and keeping you from fighting the good fight? Is it because you’re trying to go it alone without the help of God or support from other Christians? Or is it because you’ve lost sight of Jesus?

The Hebrew writer also asks us to ‘keep our eyes fixed on Jesus’. That word fixing is the Greek word ‘aphorao’ which literally means to glue. And so we are to glue our eyes on Jesus, and don’t be distracted by looking anywhere else. And you can ask any athlete and they will tell you the biggest mistake they can make is take their eyes off the goal and look back when they’re running. We keep our eyes fixed on Jesus because He totally relied on His Father’s strength and mighty power.

I love that story about a Scotsman who went on a boat at Liverpool to get to America, the journey was going to take three weeks. He went to his cabin and became hungry so he started eating the cheese and crackers which he took with him for the journey. Well after a few days on the ship, because of the sea air, the crackers became soft and the cheese became hard. He popped his head out the cabin door and immediately smelled the aroma of the fine food which was coming from the dining room.

One of the ship’s crew was walking past and he stopped him and said, ‘listen I’ve got no money and I’m starving, is there any chance you can get me a small sandwich.’ The crewman asked him, ‘sir haven’t you got a boarding pass?’ The man said, ‘yes, here it is’. The crewman looked at the pass, smiled and said, ‘sir, you do know that all meals are included in the price of the boarding pass!’

Loved ones, God gives us everything we need to help us in our journey, and He helps us in so many ways to fight this good fight when we are engaged in spiritual warfare. We’ve got the Lord and His strength and mighty power, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have the Old Testament saints all cheering us on all the way to the goal. They are cheering us on saying, ‘you can do it, just like we did it, with God’s help.’

But are there any real signs in your life that could indicate that you’re not fighting this fight as well as you could?

Well I’ve made a small list of some signs which might indicate that you’re not totally relying on God’s strength and in His mighty power. If prayer is just something you do occasionally, could be it that you’re relying on yourself rather than on God? How often do you read your Bible? And when you do, is it for information or transformation? Maybe as a Christian you are so wrapped up in the present world that thoughts of eternal things never enters your mind.

Another sign to indicate whether you're relying on yourself or on God is by the gathering of God's people. It maybe church meetings, fellowship meals, and they don't move you anymore and when a study or meeting or a meal is advertised you've already made up your mind that you're just not interested in going.

What about your conscience? Does it cry out to you when you're involved in some sin you know you shouldn't be involved in? If not, it might be a sign your trying to go it alone. What about when you're singing hymns or reading the Scriptures? Do they excite you and move you in your heart? One sure sign that you're not fighting this fight with God's help is when you see and hear of brothers or sisters causing division within the church and it doesn't bother you.

Ask yourself, when was the last time you really felt God's presence in your life? If it's been a while that might be an indication that your trying to go it alone. What about when the church advertises a special outreach event and they want help? Do you offer your services to help the church win souls for Christ or leave them to it?

Loved ones, the list could go on and on and on but what I'm trying to say is that we all need to wake up. We all need to wake up and realise that this is all very real and we know it's very real because of what's going on around us.

You only have to watch the news and see it happening all over the world. You get twenty minutes of bad news, five minutes of sport, one minute of slightly better news and four minutes of weather.

Can't you see what's happening all around us? Can't you see that even God's people are still fighting and His church is still being divided? Can't you see that people are still involved in sin and people are still dying? Can't you understand that it is ultimately the devil and his followers who are behind it all?

No wonder Paul encourages in Colossians 3:1-3 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

You see there is in a sense the church at the moment is like a sleeping giant and Satan's motto is 'let sleeping giants lie', but God wants that sleeping giant back up on its feet. And God says, 'wake up church, be strong in Him and in His mighty power, put on His armour', not just the parts we want to use when we're desperate and need to use it.

But wear it all, wear it all the time, because every day of our lives we are engaging in spiritual warfare. He wants us stand, not sit on our morals, He wants us to stand in His strength and in His mighty power, not on our doctrine. Because you can be many things Christian but a strong Christian you will never be, if you rely on anything else other than God.

James 5:17+18 "Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

Loved ones, pray for God's strength and rely on His mighty power, just like Elijah did. Read your Bible daily and allow it to transform your life. Keep your mind focused on the goal of heaven. Get involved in church life and meet with other Christians as much as you can. Sing hymns from the heart and be encouraged by them. When you hear of church fights and divisions don't grumble about it, pray about it and try and support some unity again.

Let me encourage you and leave you with the words of a dying man who knew exactly what it was like to be engaged in this spiritual warfare. And I pray that we too, each and every one of can say these words with Paul one day.

2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."