

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

A series of message production resources that address Christians and non-Christians alike with the reality of evil spiritual forces, and the power God offers people to overcome them. These resources were created to aid Christian radio producers. We believe they will also be helpful for other people involved in Christian ministry. We have endeavored to emphasize clarity over style. We have limited the use of long sentences, specialized vocabulary, and Western cultural allusions and illustrations.

by

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with

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Hope in the Darkness: An Introduction

What is Hope in the Darkness?

Because of the modern emphasis on reason, many people in Western countries stopped believing in demons and the supernatural. But the experiences of people around the world testify that what the Bible says is true: there is an evil, supernatural and personal force at work in our world. The Bible calls this force Satan or the devil. The Bible says he is the head of an invisible army of fallen angels called demons or evil spirits. And the Bible gives us good news that God has triumphed over the devil on the cross. It tells us that God gives us his Holy Spirit to strengthen us to defeat Satan's evil schemes against us.

Hope in the Darkness is a series of 25 radio messages that summarize the Bible's good news about God's victory over evil, unseen forces. Much of the world struggles with fear of curses and evil spirits. Many people are involved with witchcraft and idolatry. Many have questions about the relationship of sin and sickness. What does the Bible say about Satan and the demonic forces that he leads? What has God done about evil and Satan? How should Christians respond when they see evil and injustice in the world? What hope do people have against the strange, evil forces at work in their lives? These are the kinds of questions this series of messages addresses.

How to use Hope in the Darkness?

Because this series was written with traditional peoples in mind, some producers may find that some messages will not fit their listeners' needs. We encourage each producer to read over the scripts prayerfully to decide which ones are the most helpful for their listeners.

These messages on Hope in the Darkness are arranged as follows:

- Messages 1 – 6: The Rise and Fall of Satan.
- Messages 7 – 20: How Jesus Destroys Satan's Evil Works, such as demon possession, magic, curses, sickness, ancestor worship, and injustice.
- Messages 21 – 25: Satan's attacks Against Believers and the Church, focusing on such issues as spiritual warfare, persecution and pride.

Each message or series of messages is found in the left column of the page. The right column is reserved for background notes and special instructions that the producers may find helpful.

A personal word from the authors:

We encourage producers to pray regularly at all times for their lives and ministries. We recommend heightened prayer for God's protection and power as you use these messages.

It is our sincere desire and prayer that *Hope in the Darkness* will be a valuable tool in reaching many persons with ‘Words of Hope’—the good news of the power and victory of Jesus Christ.

In his name,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dave Gifford".

Dave Gifford

Acknowledgment:

The writers have not personally witnessed all of the realities mentioned in the messages. We were both ‘stretched’ beyond our experience in writing many of the messages. For this reason we enlisted the aid of a number of international consultants from countries like Nigeria, Indonesia and Korea, who shared their personal experiences and reviewed several of the scripts. We are greatly indebted to them for their invaluable assistance.

Explanatory notes and space for your notes:**WE ALL HAVE THREE ENEMIES**

Theme: We need to distinguish three different spiritual enemies: The flesh (the sinful nature each person has), the world, and unseen demonic spirits.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:

Why do people do evil? Why do people everywhere commit harmful, destructive acts? More importantly, why do *we ourselves* do and say things we know are wrong?

We think of evil as a part of life. We are used to seeing ourselves and others do wrong. But **the existence of evil is a strange thing**. Think about it:

- We know what is right and wrong. But still we do what is wrong.
- God is our Creator and Judge. We know his commands. Yet we do not obey him as we ought.
- Our society's laws and customs tell us what we should and should not do. But people ignore the law and its threats of punishment and do wrong anyway.
- Sometimes we do not even *want* to do wrong! We are divided against ourselves. Part of us knows evil will be harmful for us or for our families. But another part of us is irresistibly drawn to evil. Why is this so?

The Bible tells us that there are three forces or powers that tempt and drive people to sin. They are the enemies of God and of everyone who follows him. They are the flesh, the world and the devil. Today we want to think about each of these enemies.

1. The Flesh*

When the first man and woman disobeyed God, their bodies and souls changed. They became corrupt. So now every person is born with a "sinful nature" (the Bible calls this "the flesh"). This sinful nature is the part of us that desires to disobey God. It battles against our desire to do good.

***The Bible uses the word 'flesh' in different ways.**

a) Sometimes it means our bodies or the skin on our bodies.

b) Sometimes it means people ("all flesh").

c) Sometimes it means the normal, non-evil limitations of being human—the things people can't do but God can ("The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak").

Here is what the Bible says:

I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 7:22-25, NLT

2. The World*

The Bible also says that sinful people unite together to oppose God and to do things that displease him. They form patterns of behavior that tempt others into joining them. The Bible calls these patterns of behavior "the world." It says,

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

Romans 12:2, NLT

An important part of the battle against evil is to fight the world:

- To resist joining others when they do evil.
- To influence people for good instead of letting them influence us for evil.
- To work with other followers of Jesus to make our world a better place. We can bring changes to our communities, our nation and our world.

But that is not all. There is one more enemy:

3. The Devil

The Bible says that some of God's helpers, called angels, turned against God. They are now called demons or evil spirits. Their leader is called Satan or the devil. The Bible says this:

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and

d) Sometimes Paul uses the term 'the flesh' to describe the condition of all people who do not believe in Jesus. Everyone who is not a believer still belongs to 'the flesh,' the old way of things. But people who believe in Jesus die to the flesh and are re-born as people who now belong to the Spirit.

e) The Apostle Paul also talks about flesh as a controlling power (a law, principle or tendency) inside of each of us, even believers. Many English translations translate flesh as 'sinful nature' when this is the meaning. It is the part of us that wants to sin and disobey God.

*The Bible uses the word "world" in different ways.

a) Sometimes it means the earth we live on.

b) Sometimes it means the total number of all people – "God so loved the world," (John 3:16).

c) But it also speaks of the world as people who do wrong deeds and think wrong thoughts.

The world is wrong ideas, wrong attitudes and wrong patterns of behavior that people share between themselves.

There is a saying: "You can take the Christian out of the world, but you can't take the world out of the Christian." If we separate ourselves from others but still hold to false beliefs and practices, then we have not escaped the world.

authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:11-12, NLT

This evil army of demons works through our sinful nature and through the world. But demons also attack people directly. They can deceive people, harm people, make them sick, and even enter people to control them! But the verses we just read show us that followers of Jesus have spiritual armor (protection) from evil spirits.

It is important to have a complete understanding of our fight against evil. It is dangerous for us to fight only one of these three enemies and ignore the other enemies.

If we think our sinful nature is our only enemy, we will become focused only on improving ourselves through faith and self-discipline. We will neglect the larger needs of society. And we will experience defeat because there are other, unseen powers against whom we must battle.

If we think the world is our only enemy, we will focus only on changing societies, rules for personal behavior and institutions through politics, education and reform. We will forget that the world is made up of people, and each person's life has to change. We will focus on the visible world and overlook the influence of unseen, evil forces.

And, if we think the unseen demonic world is our only enemy, we will focus on ways to stop demons. We will not try to make our lives and our societies better. We will blame evil spirits for our problems while our hearts, our families and our nations go unchanged.

This is the first in a series of messages on the unseen, demonic world. In this series we will discover how Jesus defeats Satan and his army of demons. We will see the great power that Jesus gives to each of his followers to fight the devil. We will see how faith in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit destroys our fear of unseen powers.

We all believe there are unseen powers that can help or hurt

us. But **we must always remember** that the fight against evil is more than just a matter of fighting evil spirits. It is also a matter of bringing our sinful natures under control by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is also a matter of bringing change to our world by our example and by our united efforts as faithful followers of Jesus.

Our enemies are many. Some are seen and some are unseen. But take heart! God's power is greater! And he protects and strengthens his followers.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own goodness.”

2 Peter 1:3, NIV

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer of trust in God's power]

Explanatory Notes:**THE GREAT ACCUSER**

Theme: Satan is our accuser, but we can prove his accusations wrong by being faithful to God.

Bible Verses: Various verses from Job 1-2

Introduction:

There are times in every person's life when we feel like a failure. A little voice inside of us tells us, "You are no good. God doesn't love you. You are a failure. Look at all the mistakes you've made. Just give up trying to be a good person. You will never succeed."

Some people become depressed and sad when they hear the voice. It disturbs them and causes them to lose their hope and motivation. Other people become afraid when they hear the voice. They try harder to succeed. They feel guilty and ashamed, and they strive to be the best person they can be. They immerse themselves in work and activity so that they won't be able to hear the accusing voice inside them.

To whom does this accusing voice belong? And what should we do when we hear it? The Bible gives us the answers.

One of the oldest stories of the Bible is the true story of Job. Job was a rich man. But God let Job suffer greatly. Job's children died and he lost all of his wealth. Then he got sick with sores all over his body. But Job held on to his faith in God. He did not curse God when he lost everything he had. The story of Job is important because it teaches us about the meaning of suffering and gives us an example of patient endurance.

The story of Job is also important because it introduces us to Satan. Who is Satan? What does he do? Let's listen to part of the story of Job to find out.

One day, when the angels had gathered around the LORD, and Satan was there with them, the LORD asked, "Satan, where have you been?"

Satan replied, "I have been going all over the earth."

Then the LORD asked, "What do you think of my servant Job? No one on earth is like him—he is a truly good person, who respects me and refuses to do evil."

"Why shouldn't he respect you?" Satan remarked. "You are like a wall protecting not only him, but his entire family and all his property. You make him successful in whatever he does, and his flocks and herds are everywhere. Try taking away everything he owns, and he will curse you to your face."

The LORD replied, "All right, Satan, do what you want with anything that belongs to him, but don't harm Job."

Then Satan left.

In one day, Job lost all of his livestock and property. All of Job's sons and daughters were killed by various catastrophes. His servants came to tell him the horrible news.

When Job heard this, he tore his clothes and shaved his head because of his great sorrow. He knelt on the ground, then worshiped God and said:

*"We bring nothing at birth;
we take nothing with us at death.*

The LORD alone gives and takes.

Praise the name of the LORD!"

In spite of everything, Job did not sin or accuse God of doing wrong.

When the angels gathered around the LORD again, Satan was there with them, and the LORD asked, Satan, where have you been?"

Satan replied, "I have been going all over the earth."

Then the LORD asked, "What do you think of my servant Job? No one on earth is like him—he is a truly good person, who respects me and refuses to do evil. And he hasn't changed, even though you persuaded me to destroy him for no reason."

Satan answered, "There's no pain like your own.

People will do anything to stay alive. Try striking Job's own body with pain, and he will curse you to your face."

"All right!" the LORD replied. "Make Job suffer as much as you want, but just don't kill him." Satan left and caused painful sores to break out all over Job's body—from head to toe.

Then Job sat on the ash-heap to show his sorrow. And while he was scraping his sores with a broken piece of pottery, his wife asked, "Why do you still trust God? Why don't you curse him and die?"

Job replied, "Don't talk like a fool! If we accept blessings from God, we must accept trouble as well." In all that happened, Job never once said anything against God.

Job 1:6-12; 1:20-2:10, CEV

What does this story tell us about Satan? Several things.

First, Satan is an angel (a supernatural messenger). We see him with the angels who are gathered around the Lord. Other parts of the Bible tell us his story:* He was once a great angel, but out of pride he rebelled against God. He led many angels astray and they became what we now call 'demons' or 'unclean spirits,' a great army of evil beings.

Second, the story of Job tells us that Satan is an accuser and a slanderer. Satan says that Job is selfish—he only loves God for the wealth God gives him. Satan says that if God would stop rewarding Job with wealth and success, Job would curse God. Satan says that God makes Job look good by giving him financial reasons to be religious.

Satan hates God and his followers. He speaks evil against them. He accuses God of being foolish. He accuses God's followers of wrongdoing. We can see this from the names the Bible gives him:

- "Satan" means "adversary" (enemy, opponent).
- "The devil" means "Accuser" or "Slanderer" (someone who speaks hatefully against someone else).

The third truth this story teaches us is that Satan is under God's control. God gave Satan permission to test

***Those Bible verses are:**

1. Revelation 12 says that Satan lured one-third of the angels from their positions (stars are symbols for angels in Revelation). The good angels fought the evil angels and defeated them. The devil and the evil angels were cast out of heaven to the earth.

2. Luke 10:18 says that Satan fell from heaven like lightning.

3. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 speak of angels who sinned against God. God put them in a deep pit with unbreakable chains until the day of judgment.

4. 1 Timothy 3:6 says that pride is the main sin the devil is guilty of (see message #20).

Job, but he put strict limits on what Satan could and could not do.

Does it frighten you to think that a powerful creature like Satan hates you and speaks accusations against you to God? **We need not fear Satan's anger or his evil plans against us.** Satan is strictly limited in what he can do. Satan cannot do anything to hurt us unless God permits him to test us. God is in control of our lives, and he loves us very much. He may allow us to be tested for a while. We may suffer grief and loss. But he will always provide for our needs.

Finally, the story of Job assures us that we can triumph over Satan. What person has ever suffered more than Job? God took away his wealth, his family and his health. What would you do if that happened to you?

Many people would be angry with God. They would stop loving him and become resentful, angry people. But Job refused to curse God. Despite his pain, **Job triumphed over Satan's accusations.** He proved Satan wrong by remaining faithful to God. At the end of the story of Job there is no mention of Satan. Perhaps Satan felt so defeated by Job's faithfulness that he was too ashamed to show his face in heaven!

- **God wants you to be faithful.** God was proud of Job. "What do you think of my servant Job?" he asked Satan. God feels the same way about you. He is not like an angry enemy, waiting for you to fail. He is like a proud parent watching his child. He loves you and is eager to see you do what is right.
- **Satan wants you to fail.** He wants you to curse and reject God.

Wouldn't you like to make God proud of you? Wouldn't you like to make the devil ashamed of his harsh, accusing words? Don't allow Satan to be proved right. Put your trust in God. Be faithful to him when you go through difficult times. God is good. He will take care of you!

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer for God to give your listeners the faithfulness of Job and victory over Satan]

Explanatory Notes:**OUR GREAT DEFENDER**

Theme: Satan is our accuser, but Jesus defends us against his accusations and attacks.

Bible Verses: Romans 8:33-39

In our last message, we saw that there is a spirit-being named Satan. Sometimes we hear Satan's voice inside of us, accusing us of being worthless failures. His voice tells us that God could never love us. His voice causes many people to be ashamed and lose hope.

Satan was once an angel, a special messenger of God. But Satan was too proud. He tried to overthrow God, and failed. God threw Satan and the other angels who joined his rebellion out of heaven.

Now Satan and the evil angels, also called demons or evil spirits, oppose God and his followers. They accuse God of wrong doing. They find fault with believers. Their mouths speak accusations and lies.

We heard the story of Job, a rich man. Satan accused Job of a selfish love for God. He said Job only loved God because God gave him everything. "Take away his wealth and his health," Satan said, "and Job will curse you to your face!" God let Satan take away Job's wealth, his sons and daughters and even his health. But Job remained faithful to God. He proved that Satan's accusations were false. Satan was defeated and ashamed.

But Job was an extraordinary hero. What about the rest of us? Many of us fail when God tests us. Many of us would like to be as strong or faithful as Job was, but we are weak. Is there hope for us when Satan accuses us? Or will God stop loving us when Satan's accusations against us prove to be right?

The Bible gives us an answer that is filled with hope and good news. If we follow Jesus and put our hope in him, he will protect us from every attack and accusation of the evil one. Listen to this comforting promise from the Bible:

If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them? Or can anyone condemn them? No indeed! Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us. Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death? It is exactly as the Scriptures say,

*“For you we face death all day long.
We are like sheep on their way
to be butchered.”*

In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Romans 8:33-39, CEV

What beautiful and comforting words from the Bible. What do they tell us?

First, they tell us that Jesus died for us and rose from death to life. The Bible says that Jesus' death on the cross was very important. In his justice God commanded that all sinners be put to death. On the cross Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins. He died in our place. When the devil accuses us of sin, we who believe in Jesus can be confident. Our sins are paid for by the death of Jesus. God will not destroy us for our sins because Jesus took the punishment upon himself.

Second, these Bible verses tell us that Jesus intercedes for us in heaven. Jesus ascended to heaven and stands before God the Father. He intercedes (“prays”) to the Father on our behalf. Think of it! The devil is an accuser. He speaks evil words against us to God. But there is someone else in heaven who speaks on our behalf. Jesus defends us against the accusations of the devil. When God thinks about us, whose words will he listen to? Will God listen to the words of the devil, the enemy of all that is good? Or will he listen to the words of his dear Son, Jesus Christ? Of course he will listen to his Son.

Sometimes we feel alone. We feel as if no one is on our side. We think we have no one who will defend us. But the Bible says we have someone who speaks kind, loving words about us. Jesus prays to his Father for us. What a comfort it is to know that Jesus defends everyone who believes in him from the terrible accusations of the devil.

Finally, the Bible verses tell us that God loves with an everlasting love everyone who follows Jesus Christ.

Let's hear the promise again: *"Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!"* (Verse 39).

We saw earlier that God demands that all sins be punished by death. We heard that Jesus prays to God the Father for us. Does this mean that God hates us? Does it mean he is an angry God?

On the one hand, it is true that God hates all sin and wrongdoing. He is a just judge who does not approve of injustice. He is a Creator who does not like to see his creatures disobey him. He does not want to see the universe which he created filled with evil. He is angry to see people he made become the victims of other, cruel people.

But the Bible also says that God loves all people and desires them to be saved.* That is why he sent Jesus to die for us. And the verses we read from Romans tell us that he has a special, unbreakable love for everyone who puts their faith in Jesus. Jesus acts as their shield and refuge. God's anger does not fall on them. They are covered by Jesus' love. God promises to love them forever.

* John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4.

Do you ever feel that all is lost? Is your life filled with despair? Do you have bad dreams that you fear will come true? Do stories of the power of demons make you anxious or upset? When the devil troubles you by reminding you of the mistakes you have made and the sins you have committed, remember: God loves you! He wants the best for you. He has made a way by which you can be free from the accusations of the evil one. He sent his Son Jesus to die for you. If you believe in Jesus, God will pour out his love on you forever. And no one, not even the devil, can separate you from God's love. Amen!

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer of thanksgiving and trust]

Explanatory Notes:

WHO IS IN CONTROL OF THE WORLD?

Theme: Satan was the ruler of this world, but Jesus defeated him by the cross.

Bible Verses: Colossians 2:13-15, NIV

Introduction:

There is a war going on around the world. It is a very important war. No, it's not the war against terrorism. Guns and bombs are not the destroyers in this war. The war I'm talking about is the spiritual war between good and evil. God and his army of angels are fighting against Satan and his army of demons. They are fighting for control over the people of the world. Do you ever feel there is a battle against your soul? Are you afraid that some evil force will hurt you?

In the battle between good and evil, we are often afraid that evil will win. Many days we wonder if evil has already won. We see evil people gather wealth and power. We see good people turn bad when they are seduced (tempted) by evil. We often feel we are losing the battle.

I want to tell you today that the war between good and evil has already been won. But the winner may surprise you. Evil was not the winner of this war. Good was the victor. God has already defeated Satan!

When did God defeat evil? The Bible gives us the answer. It tells us that **Jesus won the war against the demonic forces of evil when he died on the cross.** Here is what the Bible says:

*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision * of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. **And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a***

* **Circumcision** is the process of removing a piece of flesh (called the foreskin) from the penis. Circumcision was part of the covenant between God and Abraham in the book of Genesis

public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:13-15, NIV

What do these three Bible verses mean?

1. Verse 13: We were dead, but God made us alive.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.

Each one of us have broken the laws God gave us for right living. We have *sinned*. The punishment for sin is death. Death is more than just our physical death at the end of life.

- We all have an inner desire to disobey God.
- We are spiritually powerless. We are dead in our spirits.
- We all die because of sin.
- We are excluded from the promise of eternal life.

But God decided to give us life again. He sent Jesus to die on the cross to destroy the power of death. Listen to these exciting words from the Bible:

*Yes, by God's grace, **Jesus tasted death for everyone in all the world.***

*Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and **only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death.** Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.*

Hebrews 2:9, 14-15, NLT

Everyone who believes in Jesus is truly alive:

- Instead of being spiritually useless like a dead body, each believer has new spiritual power to obey God.
- Instead of being excluded from eternal life, believers receive the assurance that they will live forever because Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus will never die again. He has eternal life, and he offers that eternal life to all people. We believe and God makes us live again.

2. Verse 14: We were guilty, but God forgave us.

(chapter 17).

God required all of Abraham's male descendants to be circumcised. Circumcision became a distinguishing mark between Jews (descendants of Abraham) and Gentiles (non-Jews). The word 'circumcision' came to mean "people who are accepted by God and included in his covenant" and 'uncircumcision' came to mean "people who are excluded."

What Paul means in verse 13 about the *uncircumcision of your sinful nature* is this: sin makes everyone unacceptable and excluded from God's family, even if they are physically circumcised. We all need our sinful natures removed and our sins forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross.

He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Satan thought he defeated God when he convinced the first man and woman to disobey God. Satan knew that God is a perfect Judge, and must punish sinners. Satan thought God would destroy the people he created when they sinned.

But on the cross, Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins. He was punished so that we would not have to be punished. God put our guilt on him. In this way our sins were forgiven.

The laws of God that we disobeyed charged us with terrible crimes against God. These laws said, “You are guilty of sin!” But Jesus took those charges away. Now Jesus assures us, “You are innocent!” He took our guilt away.

Satan’s plan to make the entire world guilty of sin failed. Everyone who believes in Jesus can have their sins forgiven. So by faith you can have *your* sins forgiven. No sin or guilt will control you any longer.

3. Verse 15: Demonic forces fought against us, but God defeated them.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

These “powers and authorities” are the unseen demonic forces at work in the world. Their desire is to control and destroy all people. But God is far more powerful than all these powers:

- God is the all-powerful Creator of the universe. Satan is only a creature, one small part of the universe God created.
- God is present everywhere, knows all things, and can do anything. Satan has only limited power and knowledge.
- The war between good and evil was never a war between equals.

God defeated the devil and all evil powers by the death of one man, Jesus. Jesus won the war against the vast army of evil by dying. He won by sacrificing his life for others. Isn't that amazing?

Evil still exists in the world today. But Jesus' victory on the cross is a guarantee that evil will one day be completely defeated. Satan's time is limited. This gives us great confidence to fight evil today.

How do we fight evil? There are many ways:

- We can resist temptations to do evil.
- We can do what is right even when the voices in our minds and other people urge us not to do it.
- We can urge others to do good.
- We can love, serve, and forgive others.
- We can urge the leaders in society (government, police, teachers, religious leaders) to use their authority to make our communities and nations more just.
- We can protest unjust practices and laws.

At times, we feel weak and powerless. We think that none of these activities will do any good. We are tempted to give up. But we should remember that God has won the victory! Jesus "triumphed" over the demonic powers and authorities "by the cross." The time is coming when the evil we see now will only be a memory. And God is with us even now, giving us strength by his Holy Spirit. We can have courage and confidence as we battle evil in our lives and in our world.

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer of confidence in the cross of Christ.]

Explanatory Notes:**THE FINAL VICTORY**

Theme: Jesus will return to complete his victory over Satan.

Bible Verses: Revelation 20:7-21:4, NLT

Introduction:

In our last message we saw that Jesus defeated Satan by dying on the cross. Satan wants all people to die forever. Jesus died so that we could live forever. Satan wanted God to punish us for our sins. Jesus suffered for our sins so that God would forgive us and not punish us. The Bible explains,

only by dying could [Jesus] break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Hebrews 2:14-15, NLT

The war is over! Jesus won the battle between good and evil! God has triumphed over Satan on the cross! Everyone who believes in Jesus will live forever! This is the good news that believers announce throughout the world.

Jesus' defeat of Satan on the cross and his resurrection from the dead made it certain that one day all evil will be removed from the earth. Even though Satan still lives to tempt and threaten people, his time is short. Soon he will be destroyed.

How will this world-wide war finally end? The Bible describes that day with great excitement in one of the last chapters of the last book of the Bible, Revelation:

When the thousand years end,* Satan will be let out of his prison. He will go out to deceive the nations from every corner of the earth which are called Gog and Magog.* He will gather them together for battle—a mighty host, as numberless as sand along the shore. And I saw them as they went up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded God's people and the beloved

*The words in **bold print** speak of the thousand year rule of Christ and the terms Gog and Magog. These are important ideas, but you might decide they are distracting details that make your message too long and

city. But fire from heaven came down on the attacking armies and consumed them.

Then the Devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done. The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead in them. They were all judged according to their deeds. And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.

Revelation 20:7-21:4, NLT

What an exciting vision of the end of the world! We see several things that will happen in that great and wonderful day:

- The devil will gather a large army of people to attack God's people. It will be one final battle between good and evil.

complex for a brief radio message. You may wish to omit these words for this message and explain them some other time. However, if you choose to explain them, here is a simple explanation of their meaning.

The Thousand years:

Some Christians believe that there will be a 1,000-year rule of Christ on the earth from Jerusalem after he returns. But many believers (including us at Words of Hope) believe that this number is a symbol. It represents Christ's rule over his church in the present age from his resurrection until his future return. *Either way, what these verses are saying is that at the end of time Satan will gather a large army to attack believers, but Jesus will defeat Satan.*

Gog and Magog:

In many ways, John connects the revelation he receives from God to the books of the Old Testament. One of those books, Ezekiel, gives the names Gog and Magog to the last enemies who oppose God's people in the end times. Gog is the name of a prince and Magog is the name of his people.

- God will defeat Satan completely. He will throw him into a lake of fire to be punished forever because of all the evil things he did to harm us and all people.
- God will raise all the dead people to life again. He will judge them for their deeds.
- God will come to live among the people who love and follow him. He will take away all their pain and suffering. No one will ever need to cry tears of sadness again. God will also take away all sin and evil. He will even take away death, so that no one will ever die again.

Until that great day, the two opposing forces continue to battle.

- Satan, who has already lost his war for control of the world, fights to deceive and harm as many people as he can before his time is over. He will keep turning people against God for as long as he can.
- Jesus, the winner of the battle, is King of Kings. He rules over his people. He gives us the command to take his good news to all people, so that they will believe it. He gives them the power to fight against the forces of darkness that try to control them. Believers fight Satan by resisting temptation, doing good, loving others and influencing their communities for good because God gives them his powerful Holy Spirit.

I have an urgent question for every person who is listening to this message: Whose side are you on? Are you on the side of Satan, the loser, who will be punished forever for the evil he does? Or will you follow Jesus, the winner, who will rule forever and will wipe away every tear from the eyes of his people?

Maybe you are a person who gossips and criticizes others. Did you know that your hurtful words are weapons the devil uses to do his work? Wouldn't you rather use your words to encourage and comfort others? Wouldn't you rather have the joy of knowing that your words are instruments in the service of Jesus Christ?

I urge you to put your faith in Jesus. Love and follow him. He gave us beautiful words that bring salvation and hope.

He gives us his Holy Spirit to strengthen us and make us wise. He promises us eternal life if we follow him. So we can have peace in our hearts in a world where evil forces battle God for control. When we believe, we are on God's side. We are victors (winners, champions) forever!

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer that your listeners will put their trust in Jesus]

Explanatory Notes:

THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL GOES ON

Theme: Jesus' return is delayed but will come suddenly. We must serve him faithfully until then.

Bible Verses: Luke 12:35-48, CEV

Introduction:

In our last two messages we said that Jesus won the world-wide war against sin and evil. He triumphed over Satan and all the forces of darkness by his death on the cross. We also saw that Jesus will return to make his victory complete. This gives us great confidence in our own battles against evil. We can say no to Satan's temptations and ignore his threats because we know his time is short. Jesus already defeated him. When Jesus returns he will completely destroy all evil powers forever.

But Jesus died 2,000 years ago. Why are we still waiting for his return? Why does evil still seem so strong after all these years? What answers can we find in the Bible? Did Jesus give us any teachings that help us on this subject? Yes, he did.

- On the one hand, Jesus promised his followers that he would return soon. He told them to always be ready for his coming. He could come at any time.
- On the other hand, Jesus also suggested in his teachings that he might delay before coming back. I invite you to look at one of the stories Jesus told about waiting for his return. The story also explains how we can fight against the devil.

Here is the story:

Be ready and keep your lamps burning just like those servants who wait up for their master to return from a wedding feast. As soon as he comes and knocks, they open the door for him. Servants are fortunate if their

*master finds them awake and ready when he comes! I promise you that he will get ready and have his servants sit down so he can serve them. Those servants are really fortunate if their master finds them ready, even though he comes late at night or early in the morning. You would surely not let a thief break into your home, if you knew when the thief was coming. So always be ready! **You don't know when the Son of Man will come.***

Peter asked Jesus, "Did you say this just for us or for everyone?"

The Lord answered:

Who are faithful and wise servants? Who are the ones the master will put in charge of giving the other servants their food supplies at the proper time? Servants are fortunate if their master comes and finds them doing their job. A servant who is always faithful will surely be put in charge of everything the master owns.

But suppose one of the servants thinks that the master won't return until late. Suppose that servant starts beating all the other servants and eats and drinks and gets drunk. If that happens, the master will come on a day and at a time when the servant least expects him. That servant will then be punished and thrown out with the servants who cannot be trusted.

If servants are not ready or willing to do what their master wants them to do, they will be beaten hard. But servants who don't know what their master wants them to do will not be beaten so hard for doing wrong. If God has been generous with you, he will expect you to serve him well. But if he has been more than generous, he will expect you to serve him even better.

Luke 12:35-48, CEV

In this story the Lord Jesus compares himself to the master of a house who has many servants. The master left for a wedding feast. In Jesus' time wedding receptions could last for days. The master left his servants in charge of his

household. But they did not know when the master would return.

- The good servants serve their master faithfully. They are diligent and prepared. If he comes later than they expect him, he still finds them serving.
- The bad servants do not serve him faithfully. They are lazy, selfish and inconsiderate. Since the master delays in coming, they think he will be very late. Then, when he comes, he catches them in their evil ways.

1. By telling this story, Jesus suggests that he will not return as soon as people think. His followers expected him to return soon, but he is still in heaven now. The Bible tells us that he has not returned because God is patiently giving people time to believe in Jesus and be saved from their sins. It says, “The Lord isn’t slow about keeping his promises, as some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.” (2 Peter 3:9, CEV)

2. But even though he is late, his arrival will be swift and sudden. He will find some people faithfully serving him. He will find other people saying, “He will never come back!” These people will be surprised and ashamed when Jesus returns. It is foolish to say to ourselves, “I can forget about God. He is not coming soon.” When Jesus comes, I want to be ready for him. Don’t you?

3. What does this story have to do with the war between God and Satan? It tells us to be patient and faithful as we battle the devil and the evil army of spirits he commands. The war was won 2,000 years ago, but there are still battles that we must fight. Even though the enemy’s defeat is certain, he has not given up yet. He will fight believers until the day that Christ throws him into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Until then, the apostles urge us to “Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12) and, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3). This *military* language speaks of a *spiritual* battle. Our battle against Satan is carried out **primarily** * through prayer,

***Producers:** The highlighted word ‘**primarily**’ is an important

resisting temptation, good deeds, acts of love, and our wonderful message of forgiveness in Jesus. We use military force very cautiously, to defend ourselves and to restrain people who become a threat to others.

Listener, whose side are you on?

- If you don't follow Jesus, the time to believe is now. God is waiting patiently for you to turn from evil and follow him.
- Or maybe you are a bad servant. You believe in Jesus, but you have grown lazy, unfaithful, or unloving. Instead of fighting the devil, you are giving in to his temptations. There is still time to pick up your weapon and fasten your armor. Begin again the fight you once fought, before the Master arrives and catches you foolishly sinning.
- Or maybe you are a faithful servant, a diligent soldier, but you are tired of the battle. Don't give up! Your Commander will return. He will congratulate you and reward you for your faithfulness. Then you will say, as one faithful follower of Jesus did:

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return."

2 Timothy 4:7-8, NLT

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer for Christ's return]

one here. You may feel the need to address the issue of the use of force.

In your message you will want to achieve a balance between two extremes.

On the one hand, Christianity is not a violent, aggressive religion. Christianity emphasizes the power of love and prohibits murder, revenge and unjust anger. When you use military language about 'wars' battles' and 'fighting,' don't give your listeners the impression that you want to encourage physical attacks of violence against unbelievers.

On the other hand, you do not want to give your believing listeners the impression that our spiritual 'battle' is **only** about prayer and good deeds and **never** includes the use of physical force (violence). There may be occasions in which the use of force is necessary against people who wish to harm others. Most Christians agree that the use of force is permissible for believers under certain conditions. For example, Christians have the right to defend themselves and others from harm. Police have the responsibility to use force against lawbreakers. Soldiers have the responsibility to defend their country. When people become a threat to others, it is irresponsible to retreat into prayer and fail to act. Don't encourage your Christian listeners to be irresponsible in this way.

Explanatory Notes:**THE FINGER OF GOD****(How to Get Rid of Evil Spirits)**

Theme: Only Jesus has the power to defend people from the power of demons.

Bible Verses: Luke 11:14-26, CEV

Introduction:

People have invented many ways to defend themselves from the power of evil spirits.

- Some people wear special bracelets and other jewelry.
- Some wear red material in their clothing.
- Some put statues of lions or dragons outside their homes to scare demons away.
- Some people chant special combinations of words in order to try to drive demons away.

Producers: You will need to decide if this message is an important one for your listeners, and whether the examples in the introduction are helpful for your listeners.

Sooner or later people discover that these methods can never free them from attacks by evil spirits. The evil spirits will just continue to bother them. But the Bible records that there was someone who could free people from the influence of evil spirits just by speaking. His name was Jesus.

1. A True Story About Jesus

Even Jesus' enemies recognized his power over evil spirits. They could not understand how he was able to do it. So they accused him of casting out demons by the prince of demons. Listen as I read to you this true story about Jesus from the Bible:

Jesus forced a demon out of a man who could not talk. And after the demon had gone out, the man started speaking, and the crowds were amazed. But some people said, "He forces out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons!"

Others wanted to put Jesus to the test. So they asked him to show them a sign from God. Jesus knew what

they were thinking, and he said:

A kingdom where people fight each other will end up in ruin. And a family that fights will break up. If Satan fights against himself, how can his kingdom last? Yet you say that I force out demons by the power of Beelzebub. If I use his power to force out demons, whose power do your own followers use to force them out? They are the ones who will judge you. But if I use God's power to force out demons, it proves that God's kingdom has already come to you.*

When a strong man arms himself and guards his home, everything he owns is safe. But if a stronger man comes and defeats him, he will carry off the weapons in which the strong man trusted. Then he will divide with others what he has taken.

If you are not on my side, you are against me. If you don't gather in the crop with me, you scatter it.

When an evil spirit leaves a person, it travels through the desert, looking for a place to rest. But when it doesn't find a place, it says, "I will go back to the home I left." When it gets there and finds the place clean and fixed up, it goes off and finds seven other evil spirits even worse than itself. They all come and make their home there, and that person ends up in worse shape than before.

Luke 11:14-26, CEV

***God's power:** The original Greek reads, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God." This is the reason for our choice of words for the title of the message.

2. What Do Jesus' Words Mean?

Jesus explains to his adversaries that he could not possibly cast out Satan by the power of Satan. That would not make sense—why would Satan fight against himself? And if Jesus casts demons out by Satan's power, then by what power do Jesus' opponents claim to cast out demons? How do they know they are not also casting demons out with Satan's power? "No," Jesus says, "I cast demons out by the finger (power) of God."

A. Jesus can overpower Satan because he is stronger than Satan. Satan may try to defend the things he has gained power over, but Jesus is stronger. He will overpower Satan and carry off all of Satan's

possessions. What are Satan's possessions? They are the people whom Satan has trapped in slavery to sin. Jesus came to free people from the devil. Jesus "disarmed the devil" (Hebrews 2:14) and rescues people from his power. He does this because he has God's power.

B. Jesus then says, "*If you are not on my side, you are against me. If you don't gather in the crop with me, you scatter it*" (Verse 23). In other words, **everyone must decide whether they follow Satan or Jesus.** Satan and Jesus are two rival kings. They both want to rule the world. We must choose which king to follow. We can't remain undecided. Either we are on Christ's side or we are against him.

C. **Either Jesus will live in our heart or demons will.** Jesus concludes with a story about an evil spirit who leaves a person, but then returns with more powerful demons. They make the person's life even worse than before. This is what happens to people if they remove evil spirits but do not ask Jesus into their hearts. Our heart (our soul, the invisible part of us) is like a house. Either Jesus will live in our heart or demons will.

If we remove an evil spirit from our life but we do not ask Jesus to live in our heart, we leave our hearts unoccupied. We clean and sweep our hearts but we don't fill it. The demon will see that our heart is empty, and he will return with more demonic friends. He will bring stronger friends with him because he doesn't want us to remove him like the first time.

D. If we remove an evil spirit from our hearts, **we should ask Jesus to come into our hearts and live there.** Jesus will make his home in our hearts, then no demon will ever be able to move into our hearts again. We will be free!

Conclusion:

If you are listening to this message right now and are suffering because of an evil spirit, I have good news for you. Jesus is stronger than any demon. He is the strong man who came to take away the power which demons use against you. He wants to free you from the powers of evil.

Will you turn to Jesus? Will you let him rescue you from darkness? Let me pray for you now.

[Please conclude with an appropriate prayer for the deliverance of your demon-possessed listeners and for their salvation]

Explanatory Notes:

THE STRONGEST SPIRIT OF ALL

Theme: The Holy Spirit of Jesus lives in our hearts and protects us from the power of evil spirits.

Bible verses: Various. See below.

In our last message we read from the Bible that Jesus is very strong. He has the power to free us from evil spirits. We discovered that if we ask Jesus to live in our hearts, he will keep evil spirits from ever entering us again.

1. But how can Jesus live in our hearts? The Bible says Jesus is in heaven. But we are here on earth! How is this possible? The answer is that Jesus lives in our hearts through his Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised his first followers that he would send them his Holy Spirit. He said,

I have told you these things while I am still with you. But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you.

John 14:25-26, CEV

The Bible calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Christ. It says that Christ lives and rules in our hearts through his Spirit.

The Bible sums it up this way:

*And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. **And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This***

is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.

Ephesians 1:13-14, CEV

*You are no longer ruled by your desires, but by **God's Spirit, who lives in you.** People who don't have **the Spirit of Christ** in them don't belong to him. **But Christ lives in you.** So you are alive because God has accepted you, even though your bodies must die because of your sins. Yet God raised Jesus to life! **God's Spirit now lives in you,** and he will raise you to life by his Spirit.*

Romans 8:9-11, CEV

So every believer has Jesus' Spirit living in him.

B. The Spirit does many things to help believers:

- He* reminds them of Jesus' words.
- He gives them power to resist temptation.
- He gives them special abilities with which they serve and love others.
- He produces the fruit of love and goodness in their lives.

* **“He”**: Do not use the pronoun “it” when referring to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power or force. He is the third Person of the Trinity. He is God.

The Holy Spirit of Jesus is the greatest spirit of all. He is not a created spirit. He is the very Spirit of God. He is God! And if we believe in Jesus, he lives inside of you and me!

C. People who follow Jesus can't be controlled by evil spirits. The Spirit of God protects them from the spirits in the world. The Bible encourages us with these words:

...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

1 John 4:4, NLT

What a great promise! We have the Spirit of God living inside our hearts. He will guide us. He will strengthen us. And he will protect us against every attack of the evil one. By ourselves we are weak, small and powerless against

demonic forces. No magic amulets or charms or formulas can ever help us against their power. But because the Spirit lives in us, we have great power with which to resist them.

Application:

Listener, if you are not yet a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, I urge you to run to him for protection. He is strong enough to drive the demons from your life. He will come and live in your heart by his Spirit if you welcome him into your life. And he will protect you from being controlled by evil spirits.

And if you are already a follower of Jesus, rejoice! Praise God for the wonderful gift of his Spirit. Celebrate your freedom from slavery to the forces of darkness. Live your life to please and praise our Almighty Deliverer.

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer]

Explanatory Notes:**POWER FROM GOD ON HIGH**

Theme: Jesus gives believers the power to cast out demons from other people.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:

Believers in Jesus Christ have this wonderful word of encouragement from the Bible:

...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

1 John 4:4, NLT

Jesus lives in us through his Holy Spirit, which he has given to us. The Holy Spirit protects us from being controlled or possessed by Satan and the demons (or evil spirits) who follow him. The Spirit gives us power for our protection.*

But the power we have from the Spirit is not only for our own good. It is also for us to use to help others. **Jesus gives us the power to cast demons out of other people.** He gives us the same power he used to cast out evil spirits in his ministry. Jesus himself gave us this promise:

***Have faith in me** when I say that the Father is one with me and that I am one with the Father. Or else have faith in me simply because of the things I do. I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, **you will do the same things that I am doing. You will do even greater things,** now that I am going back to the Father.*

John 14:11-12, CEV

Here are similar promises the Bible gives to all believers:

Resist the devil, and he will run from you.

James 4:7, CEV

*Every child of God can defeat the world, and our **faith***

*This power is not a power that dwells in us. It is not a power that is 'ours' and that we can completely control. It is God's power and always depends on God's will.

is what gives us this victory. No one can defeat the world without having faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

1 John 5:4-5, CEV

Did you hear what these verses say about the importance of faith in Jesus? **People who don't believe in Jesus do not have the same power that believers have.** Listen to this story from the Bible:

*God gave Paul the power to work great miracles. *People even took handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's body, and they carried them to everyone who was sick. All of the sick people were healed, and the evil spirits went out.*

Some Jewish men started going around trying to force out evil spirits by using the name of the Lord Jesus. They said to the spirits, "Come out in the name of that same Jesus that Paul preaches about!"

Seven sons of a high priest named Sceva were doing this, when an evil spirit said to them, "I know Jesus! And I have heard about Paul. But who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them up. They ran out of the house, naked and bruised.

*When the Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus heard about this, they were so frightened that they praised the name of the Lord Jesus. Many who were followers now started telling everyone about the evil things they had been doing. Some who had been practicing witchcraft even brought their books and burned them in public. ** These books were worth about fifty thousand silver coins. So the Lord's message spread and became even more powerful.*

Acts 19:11-20, CEV

So, we have a special power over demons that unbelievers do not have. **This power is not just for certain people like Paul. It is God's promise for all believers.** Sometimes God gives people like Paul extraordinary abilities. They can drive out demons more than most believers can. But the power to cast out demons is a promise for all Christians, because God's Spirit lives in them.

*The people were superstitious and believed that by touching a holy man they might be healed. People are not normally healed by doing this, and we shouldn't try to imitate these people by using handkerchiefs and aprons. In the Bible people are healed by having faith in God's power.

But God wanted to show these superstitious people that the Apostle Paul spoke with God's authority, so he used even Paul's touch to heal them and cast out their demons.

**The Ephesians saw how important it was to destroy everything they own that had to do with the occult, witchcraft and magic. A silver coin was a worker's wages for an entire day, so the Ephesians lost the equivalent of 50,000 days' wages.

If your listeners struggle with attachment to the occult, encourage them to make the same sacrifice the Ephesian converts did and destroy all objects of witchcraft and demon worship. See message #2 for more on these verses.

With this great power comes great responsibility. When people are enslaved by evil spirits, they need our help. It would be selfish if we were to say, "I am safe from demons. So I will relax. I will enjoy my own life and not worry about the needs of others." If we think like this, we are like soldiers running away from a battle. Such a reaction is shameful and cowardly.

But we do not need to be ashamed. We do not need to be fearful. We should trust in God's power. We can enter the spiritual battle with confidence in him. Instead of running away from danger in order to protect ourselves, we can be alert to recognize people who are in danger and rescue them from the devil's power. We can bring freedom to people who suffer in slavery to sin and evil spirits.

Application

Friend, if you are a follower of Jesus, I urge you to take hold of the power that you have in Jesus Christ. Pray to him for strength and courage. Put your trust in the Holy Spirit. Don't run from opportunities to free other people from captivity. Instead,

Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Ephesians 5:16-17, NLT

If you are not a believer, and you are suffering from the harmful power of evil spirits, I urge you to seek out someone who believes in Jesus. God has given them a power and a message that can help you. Let them tell you the good news of Jesus. Let them show you the way to freedom from sin and slavery to false spirits. Let them point you to the One who is Lord of heaven and earth. May Jesus become the Lord of your life, too.

[*Conclude with an appropriate prayer*]

Explanatory Notes:**BETTER THAN MAGIC**

Theme: God disapproves of magic and witchcraft and invites us to trust him for what we need.

Bible Verses: Acts 19:11-20, Deuteronomy 18:9-14

Introduction:

In our last message we discovered that believers in Jesus Christ have the power to cast evil spirits out of people. We heard the story of how the apostle Paul drove demons out of people in the city of Ephesus. But when unbelievers from that place tried to do what Paul did, the demons did not come out of people. In fact, the demons attacked and beat up the unbelievers who were trying to cast them out!

This frightened many people in the city of Ephesus. Many of them became believers in Jesus. Then they did something amazing. Let's listen to the end of that story again:

The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing magic brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.*

Acts 19:11-20, NLT

The people in Ephesus realized that magic is evil. It is evil because it does not help people get rid of evil spirits. But more importantly, it is evil because God hates it. The Ephesians had spent millions of dollars on books with magic spells in them. They believed the magic spells would help them get rid of demons. They believed they could make their lives better. But they saw that what they really needed was the love and the power of Jesus. They gladly confessed their evil deeds, burned their expensive books, and began

***Bonfire:** a large fire in a public place such as a street, in which people destroy things that they are ashamed of.

Do your people believe in magic? Are there ceremonies or objects used in magical ceremonies? What would happen if new believers destroyed the objects they use in magic? How would unbelievers react? How can you help them? Is there a true story about believers that you can tell

to follow him.

them?

For the Ephesians this was a new and wonderful discovery. But God had told this to people long ago in the laws he gave to his people Israel. Before he led them into the land he promised to give them, God gave Israel a list of some of the practices that were evil in his sight. Listen as I read that list from the law of God:

Soon you will go into the land that the LORD your God is giving you. The nations that live there do things that are disgusting to the LORD, and you must not follow their example. Don't sacrifice your son or daughter. And don't try to use any kind of magic or witchcraft to tell fortunes or to cast spells or to talk with spirits of the dead.

The LORD is disgusted with anyone who does these things, and that's why he will help you destroy the nations that are in the land. Never be guilty of doing any of these disgusting things!

You will go in and take the land from nations that practice magic and witchcraft. But the LORD your God won't allow you to do those things.

Deuteronomy 18:9-14, CEV

From the strong language he uses, there is no doubt that God hates these practices! What is so evil about them? Let's look briefly at each one:**

1. “Don't sacrifice your son or daughter” (verse 10)

Some of the nations practiced child sacrifice. People allowed their children to die in a fire as a burnt sacrifice in honor of a god. They did this so that the god would give them information they were seeking. They wanted the gods to tell them information about the future, or other hidden, secret information. This practice is obviously very evil because it involves murdering little children. But it is also evil because people used it to try to manipulate (control) God. They thought, “God, I gave you my child. Now you have to do what I tell you.” But God is our master, not our servant. We may not command him anything.

**The information we used for Deuteronomy 18 comes from *The Prophet and His Message* by Michael Williams.

2. **“And don’t try to use any kind of magic or witchcraft to tell fortunes (Verses 10-11).”** People used many different ways to discover secret information. They studied the internal organs of animals. They studied the stars. They used objects and images. God says all these ways of finding out the future are evil and disgusting. God invites us to pray to him when we need wisdom. When we refuse to pray and turn to these wicked practices, we are saying, “I don’t need God. I will find out the future without him.”

Today many people study tea leaves, palm readings, playing cards, special numbers, crystal balls, bowls of water and many other things to tell fortunes. If you are involved in any of these practices, beware! God hates all these. He invites you to turn away from them and to turn to him in prayer.

3. **“And don’t try to use any kind of magic or witchcraft . . . to cast spells (verses 10-11).”** People use special phrases, rituals and amulets because they think these things can influence spirits and gods. People who practice witchcraft wish to control people and events in order to protect themselves from harm or get what they want. They use evil religious practices for selfish motives. Magic spells and curses are some of the most evil practices that people do. Why is that?
- They are evil because they seek to harm other people. They seek to act contrary to what is good and right.
 - They are evil because they spring from selfish desires. Often we want what we can’t get. We try to trick the god(s) we believe in to give us what we want. We try to control things that God forbids us to control. This is not the way for us to get the good things we need most.
 - They are evil because they ignore and avoid God. Magic and witchcraft are attempts to satisfy our needs and desires without humbly praying to God and trusting him. Using magic is the opposite of trusting God. Magic is deceitful and insincere. It is the opposite of trusting and worshiping God.
 - They are evil because they are tools of demonic

forces of darkness. People who use magic are enlisting the help of evil beings who seek to hurt them. They are doing business with their worst enemies!

For all these reasons, God hates and forbids the use of magic spells, magic rituals and magic objects.

4. **“And don’t try to use any kind of magic or witchcraft . . . to talk with spirits of the dead” (verses 10-11).** God also says that speaking with dead people is disgusting to him. God encourages all people to pray to him. But instead of praying to God, people try to speak to the dead. Some try to contact friends and family members who have died. Some pray to saints or holy people from the past. God says that we may not do these things.

Listener, are you desperate for knowledge, for protection, for success or for power? Magic and witchcraft are not the right ways to gain any of these things. But God promises to care for you if you turn to him.

- God promises that he will give wisdom to everyone who prays to him in faith.*
- God is a shield and a defender for everyone who puts their trust in him.**
- God will provide for all our needs when we submit to his will.***
- God’s Holy Spirit lives in believers and gives us the power we need to live for God.****

* James 1:5-6

**Psalm 91

***Mt. 6:31-34

My prayer for you is that you would do what the Ephesian people did. They stopped trusting in magic. They destroyed everything that had to do with magic in a big fire. They turned away from all the evil practices that are disgusting to God. They put their trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and followed him.

****Romans 8:1-14

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer]

CURSES AND BLESSINGS

Theme: Believers need not fear curses.* They should pray for blessing to come on people who curse them.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:

In this series of messages we have been considering Satan's many evil works, the supernatural forces that bring fear and pain to people. One of those invisible forces is the power behind curses.

Many people in the world are afraid of curses. When someone becomes ill, family members may take him to a doctor, but they also wonder, "Who put a curse on him?" They try to find out who would have a reason to hurt this member of their family. What can we say about curses?

- *Curses are very evil words.* People who curse other people want them to experience harm or trouble.
- *Curses provoke more curses.* One person curses another person. The second person gets angry and curses the first person worse. Then the first person places an even more powerful curse. The hate, revenge and violence grow and grow.

Some people say that curses are not real. They say curses do not have any power. But many other people have felt the powerful forces of curses. They know that curses are more than just empty words.

The Bible treats curses as real. Here is the story of a king and a magician who tried to curse God's people in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Israelites had recently left Egypt. They were traveling on foot to the land God promised to give them. King Balak of Moab, a neighboring nation, heard of them and became afraid. He hired Balaam, a magician, to curse them. Here is what the Bible says:

King Balak sent a message to Balaam son of Beor who lived among his relatives in the town of Pethor near the Euphrates River. It said:

Explanatory Notes:

*In this message, we use the word 'curse' to refer to the use of magical or powerful words to inflict harm on someone.

It is important to note that the Bible talks about God cursing. How should we understand this? Is God evil? For example, God curses people and Satan for their sinfulness (Genesis 3).

When God curses, he is not being evil. He is acting as a judge and is simply announcing his righteous punishment of sin.

When people use magic words to curse people, they are trying to act as judge instead of letting God be the judge. They are trying to harm their neighbors, whom God has commanded us to love. And they are using magic or calling on false gods. God forbids these activities.

I need your help. A huge group of people has come here from Egypt and settled near my territory. They are too powerful for us to defeat, so would you come and place a curse on them? Maybe then we can run them off. I know that anyone you bless will be successful, but anyone you curse will fail.

During the night, God asked Balaam, "Who are these people at your house?"

"They are messengers from King Balak of Moab," Balaam answered. "He sent them to ask me to go to Moab and place a curse on the people who have come there from Egypt. They have settled everywhere around him, and he wants to run them off."

*But God replied, "Don't go with Balak's messengers. **I have blessed those people who have come from Egypt, so don't curse them.**"*

The next morning, Balaam said to Balak's officials, "Go on back home. The LORD says I cannot go with you."

Numbers 22:5-6, 9-13, CEV

But King Balak was insistent. Three times he promised to pay Balaam a great sum of money so that Balaam would curse the Israelites. But all three times God put words of blessing in Balaam's mouth. God would not let Balaam curse them.

Here is what Balaam said on the third occasion:

*"I am the son of Beor,
and my words are true,
so listen to my message!
It comes from the LORD,
the God All-Powerful.
I bowed down to him
and saw a vision of Israel.*

*"People of Israel,
your camp is lovely.
It's like a grove of palm trees
or a garden beside a river.
You are like tall aloe trees
that the LORD has planted,
or like cedars growing near water.
You and your descendants*

*will prosper like an orchard
beside a stream.
Your king will rule with power
and be a greater king
than Agag the Amalekite.
With the strength of a wild ox,
God led you out of Egypt.
You will defeat your enemies,
shooting them with arrows
and crushing their bones.
Like a lion you lie down,
resting after an attack.
Who would dare disturb you?*

***“Anyone who blesses you
will be blessed;
anyone who curses you
will be cursed.”***

When Balak heard this, he was so furious that he pounded his fist against his hand and said, “I called you here to place a curse on my enemies, and you’ve blessed them three times. Leave now and go home! I told you I would pay you well, but since the LORD didn’t let you do what I asked, you won’t be paid.”

Numbers 24:3-11, CEV

The last words of Balaam’s message repeats the promise God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. God told Abraham that he would curse anyone who cursed Abraham and his descendants.

The Bible says that people who believe in Jesus are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. We are his children because we have faith, just as he had faith.* This means that no one who believes in Jesus needs to fear curses. God promises to protect him from the power of curses.

*Romans 4:16, Galatians 3:7.

Many believers around the world testify that this is true. They say that when people tried to curse them, the curses did not harm them. Instead, the curses returned to the ones who placed the curse, and afflicted them! Some believers have had people ask them for prayer, saying, “We tried to put a curse on you, but now the curse came on us and you are unharmed. Please pray to God so that we will be healed.”

Jesus gave special instructions to his followers about curses. He told them,

*“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **bless those who curse you,** pray for those who abuse you.”*

Luke 6:27-28*, NRSV

Jesus wants his followers to overcome evil with good.

When people speak evil and place curses on them, they should not respond with hateful words. They should respond with kindness, compassion and prayer for them. In this way, they can break the constant flow of cursing between people and replace it with blessing. They can stop the chain of hate and replace it with love.

*See also Romans 12:14.

Jesus only asks his followers to do what he did himself.

When his enemies beat him,

and spit on him,

and mocked him,

and nailed his hands and feet to a wooden cross

and hung him on the cross to die a cruel

death,

Jesus said,

“Father, forgive these people! They don’t know what they’re doing.” (Luke 23:34-35, CEV)

They spoke evil of him and he prayed for their forgiveness! Listener, would you like to be free from the fear of curses? Would you like to put an end to the endless series of curses that people place on each other? Come to Jesus. Come to the One who blessed those who cursed him. Only he can offer you true power and protection against curses and magic spells.

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer of trust and thanksgiving to God, whose power and blessing is greater than all curses]

Explanatory Notes:**A DESPERATE CRY TO GOD FOR HEALING**

Bible verses: Psalm 6 NIV

Introduction:

Are you in good health today? Most people greet each other with the question, “How are you?” We are happy when we can honestly say, “I am well today.” But when we are very sick, we look for ways to be healed. We want to escape from the sorrow and suffering that illness and death bring to us.

In this message I will do two things. First, I will tell you the experience of a group of people in Mexico. Next I will explain Psalm 6 in the Bible. My goal is to help you to think about your experiences with illness and to explain what the Bible teaches us clearly about illness, death and God’s power to heal.

Illustration: I have here a written report of illness and healing from the country of Mexico. It may surprise you! Even if this experience is very different from what you know, it will alert you to how people suffer and how they try to deal with serious sickness.

“Pedro knew how to play the guitar very well. But Andre did not know how to play. Andre got angry because people liked Pedro’s playing. Andre put a curse on Pedro so he would get sick. By means of the devil he gave him worms in his stomach. Pedro got deathly sick. So he sent for the shaman.* The shaman took his hand, felt his pulse and said,

“You have worms because a person was jealous of how well you play the guitar. I will tell you who did it if you will pay me 60 pesos.”**

Pedro paid the money but did not get well. So the family got the town officers to bring Andre, who was accused of causing the sickness. When he came they said

*Shaman: religious healer.

**60 pesos equaled \$10.00 USA dollars at the time, a lot of money for Pedro.

to him, “You must remove the worms which you caused by your curse.”

Then the shaman, who was also present, said, “He will get well. I will give him a glass of water to drink.” In a little while Pedro went outside and relieved himself [defecated]. Many long worms came out!

Then the town officers tied up Andre and said, “We are doing this so you won’t do this again!” They tied him up under a tree for a long time where all the people could see him. Later his hands came untied. Andre ran away and was never seen again.”

This is reported as a true story. There are thousands of stories like it about jealousy, curses, sickness and people who run away and never return. What is the solution to the problems we see in this report? What are the answers to serious questions which we have in our minds about the causes and cures for sickness? There are clear answers in the Bible, the Word of God.

**You may read the Psalm now if you want. The points that follow are taken directly from the Psalm. Its words are repeated in the message based on the NiRV English translation.

Psalm 6 – There is a book of 150 songs and prayers in the Bible. Song #6, Psalm 6, is the cry of a person who is terribly sick, afraid, feels attacked by evil persons and powers, but who turns to God in prayer for help.**

*LORD, don't correct me when you are angry.
Don't punish me when you are burning with anger.
LORD, have mercy on me. I'm so weak.
LORD, heal me. My body is full of pain.
My soul is very troubled.
LORD, how long will it be until you save me?*

*LORD, turn to me and help me.
Save me. Your love never fails.
People can't remember you when they are dead.
How can they praise you when they are in the grave?*

*My groaning has worn me out.
All night long my tears flood my bed.
My bed is wet because of my crying.
I'm so sad I can't see very well.
My eyesight gets worse because of all my enemies.*

*Get away from me, all of you who do evil.
 The LORD has heard my sobbing.
 The LORD has heard my cry for his favor.
 The LORD accepts my prayer.
 All of my enemies will be troubled and put to shame.
 They will turn back in dishonor. It will happen suddenly.*

Psalm 6, NIV

1. The Causes of Sickness:

The ancient song writer says, “*Lord, don’t correct me when you are angry. Don’t punish me when you are burning with anger*” (v.1). The Bible teaches us that we suffer from illness for three reasons:

- A. Some illnesses are a direct result of our sin. If we are sick we must ask God if he is correcting us for some specific sin or disobedience. The Bible says, “*Do not lose hope when he (God) corrects you.... He punishes everyone he accepts as a child. Put up with hard times. God uses them to train you. He is treating you as (his) children.*” (Hebrews 12:4-8, NIV) But often, like foolish children, we don’t accept his correction. We refuse the good lessons he teaches us, lessons which lead to health! The Bible reminds us that we must obey God if we want health and happiness.
- B. But not all of our sickness is a direct result of our own sin. Sometimes we get sick because we are weak, fragile creatures living in a hurt world. Death and sickness came into the world after Adam and Eve, our first human parents, disobeyed God. God punished them and all people since then with afflictions and death. So the general cause for sickness is sin and its effects in the world.
- C. Demons and evil people can hurt us. Psalm 6 says, “*My eyesight gets worse because of all my enemies.*” (v.7b) And, “*Get away from me, all of you who do evil.*” (v.8a) As we saw in the account I read to you, people want to do us harm. Can they curse us? We cannot know for sure, but we know that bad people have strong, evil powers. Don’t

laugh at people who fear such curses. Pray for yourself and for them that no one will be able to bring curses on you.

The world is troubled because we are all sinners. Think about that. If you know you have sinned and are suffering because of it, confess your sin to God promptly. If you feel the sin of others makes you sick, call on God to heal you and stop those who are hurting you. God loves every part of you and wants to heal your diseases and stop you from sinning.

2. Our Pain Because of Sickness and Death is Terrible.

I do not need to say that! We all know it, even if we don't complain openly. The song writer cries out to God just as we so often do:

"Lord, have mercy on me. I'm so weak.... My body is full of pain." (v.2)

"My soul is very troubled." (v.3a)

"People can't remember you when they are dead. How can they praise you when they are in the grave?" (v.5)

"My groaning has worn me out. All night my tears flood my bed. My bed is wet because of my crying. I'm so sad I can't see very well. My eyesight gets worse because of all my enemies." (vv.6, 7)

Most of us have had feelings like that. Our bodies are weak. We feel we are in a wrong relation to God. We see no hope because death stares us in the face with no hope of life continuing. Our nights are full of agony. We feel we are being attacked by enemies.

What about you? Is sickness troubling you deeply? Is someone you love struggling with illness? If so, you will understand the next lines of our sad Song writer.

3. God Wants You To Tell Him Your Troubles.

The Psalm writer teaches us how to be honest with God about our emotions and troubled feelings. Listen while I repeat what he said to the Lord:

"Lord, have mercy on me...Lord heal me." (v.2)

"Lord, how long will it be until you save me?" (v.3b)

“Lord, turn to me and help me. Save me. Your love never fails.” (v.4)

God is listening even though we feel he is far away and doesn't act or speak. The Song writer tells God directly: “Look at me! Heal me! Don't wait so long! Save me from my trouble.” He ends with hope and confidence in God. “Your love never fails.”

How wonderful! The Song writer speaks with emotion and urgency, but as he does so, he expresses his faith. God's love never fails. That is the main message of the whole Bible!

4. We Can Have Confidence in God for Healing and Help.

The Song writer learned from hard experiences that God heals. He was shocked by the intensity of his pain and the fears that gripped him. Death seemed like the final enemy that would end everything. Can you picture his agony? You have probably had a similar experience. Maybe today you are crying out in your heart for healing from a serious illness. Or you may be overcome with grief because of the sudden death of someone you love. What hope is there for you and me?

The Song writer speaks his faith in God boldly:

*Get away from me, all of you who do evil.
The Lord has heard my sobbing.
The Lord has heard my cry for his favor.
The Lord accepts my prayer.
All my enemies will be troubled and put to shame.
They will turn back in dishonor. It will
happen suddenly. (vv.8-10)*

The Lord is listening. He is not asleep. He does not ignore his children when they are in deep trouble. He accepts our request for help. God fights with us against all our enemies – the enemies of sickness and death, and the evil spirits and bad persons who we feel can hurt us. God will put them to shame if that is best for them.

Our first response to trouble should be to pray to God. So often we call in other help first like Pedro, who got the

village authorities to protect him and punish Andre, who he thought injured him. Our best help in trouble is God! He is a powerful and ever-present healer.

Will God always help and heal us suddenly? No, not always as we want. We are impatient and unwilling to learn from the troubles that come to us. We want them to be gone immediately. Be patient. God is never in a hurry. Sometimes he does act quickly, but not every time. Because God knows better than we do, he heals us when he decides. That is best for us!

Conclusion: I hope I have helped you to think about the problems of sickness, death, curses, our troubled feelings and deep distress. I am sure you know exactly what I mean. The solution is in the hands of a God whose love does not fail. He is the Great Doctor who knows just what to do for you today. Please, speak honestly to him now. Admit your faults and sins. Tell him your deepest fears and worst pain. He is listening. He will surely help you. That is the reason he is God. Say a prayer to him now in your heart, or aloud, and you will know what I mean.

Explanatory Notes:**JESUS IS A POWERFUL HEALER**

Theme: Jesus Christ healed many people suffering from all kinds of serious physical and mental illnesses. Does he still heal today?

Bible Verses: Mark 1:32-34a; Matthew 8:14-17; 17:17-21; Hebrews 13:7-8 (all CEV).

Introduction:

There are too many illnesses in the world! I think all of us would agree about that. Every day we, or persons we care about, suffer from some serious physical or mental illness. We would be happy if there were a healer whom we could contact immediately and get full relief from our problems.

There is one person who healed all kinds of terrible physical and mental illnesses. You have probably heard his name many times. His name is Jesus. The Bible has four short books that tell about his teaching and his acts of healing. These “Gospels (good news)” were written by men who saw how Jesus healed people again and again over a period of over three years.

Here are just a few verses from those Gospels about his healing:

That evening after sunset, all who were sick or had demons in them were brought to Jesus. In fact, the whole town gathered around the door of the house. Jesus healed all kinds of terrible diseases and forced out a lot of demons.

Mark 1:32-34a, CEV

Jesus went to the home of Peter, where he found that Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever. He took her by the hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and served Jesus a meal.

That evening many people with demons in them were brought to Jesus. And with only a word he forced out the evil spirits and healed everyone who was sick. So God’s promise came true, just as the prophet Isaiah had said,

“He healed our diseases and made us well.”

Matthew 8:14-17, CEV

Later another writer said this about Jesus:

Don't forget about your leaders who taught you God's message. Remember what kind of lives they lived and try to have faith like theirs.

Jesus Christ never changes! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 13:7-8, CEV

I would like to explain more about this Jesus and his healing power.

1. **Here is a short summary of his many healings over a period of 3 years.** These are the conditions and diseases that he healed, all of them more than once.
 - Jesus healed people with a **high fever** (John 4:52; Mark 1:30).
 - Jesus healed people with **evil spirits*** (Mark 1:23,32; 5:1-5. Matthew 9:28; Luke 8:26 and many more verses).
 - Jesus healed people with “**all kinds of terrible diseases**” (Mark 1: 33,34)
 - Jesus healed people with **leprosy** (skin diseases) (Mark 1:40)
 - Jesus healed **crippled people** – people whose bodies, hands, legs and arms did not function (Mark 2:3, 3:1).
 - Jesus raised the **dead**. (Mark 5:23; John 11:14, 38-44)
 - Jesus healed people with **terrible pain**. (Matthew 8:5 CEV)
 - Jesus healed **blind people** (John 5:3,4; 9:1-12 Matthew 9:27; Mark 8:22).
 - Jesus healed a person with a **shriveled hand** (Matthew 12:10 NIV).
 - Jesus healed people who were **crippled by a spirit . . . completely bent over and could not straighten up at all.**” (Luke 13:10-20 CEV)
 - Jesus healed people with **epilepsy** (seizures) (Matthew 17:14 CEV).**

What a staggering list of human illnesses! Today medical science has diagnosed hundreds more human ailments that afflict, cripple and kill people. It is no wonder that the Jewish religious leaders were surprised and alarmed at the

***demons, evil spirits** – People who suffered from the attacks and presence of “demons” and “evil spirits” were devastated (hurt badly) in their hearts, minds and actions. They knew these conditions were bad and not from a good God.

Today we believe that some of these conditions were mental illnesses that can be treated with counseling and medicines (like epilepsy, seizures, tremors, schizophrenia, clinical and manic depression). Other conditions are more clearly demonic in nature. And still other conditions are a mixture of mental illness and demonic oppression. We must always trust God whatever our problem may be. We can never know completely, especially about mental conditions. These conditions are evil and troubling. In prayer we ask God to drive out all evil forces. While seeking the best medical treatment and advice, we must constantly ask God to heal and

healings by Jesus. These leaders had no such power or faith to heal. They controlled the people through fear and strict rules of religious practice. But the hurting, frightened common people were ecstatic with joy! They said, “There is no one like Jesus. He has authority over sickness, demons and mental illnesses, and they are cured!”

2. Why did the Gospel writers give such a complete record of Jesus’ healings? Here are reasons why I believe the Gospel writers reported so many of Jesus’ healings in their books about his life:

- The people lived in a time of serious trouble, pain and death
- The illnesses were more than the people could bear.
- The Gospel writers wanted to give us the message that Jesus Christ is a powerful, compassionate healer. He is the same “yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 13:7)
- The disciples were impressed again and again by Jesus. They could not forget his acts of healing. So they had to write about them.
- The writers also wanted to move us to believe in Jesus also for all our deep needs. They wanted us to see that Jesus’ acts of healing were:
 - a) acts of **power** Luke 9:1-2.
 - b) **signs** directing our attention to trust in God John 3:2; 20:30, and
 - c) **wonders**, or miracles, great acts of God who does more than we can ask or think. (John 4:48; Acts 2:19; Joel 2:30)

I urge you to think about what Jesus did! I urge you to consider your own needs and the needs of people around you who are sick or deeply troubled in their minds and spirits. Christians believe Jesus is alive today. His Holy Spirit enters the hearts and lives of believers. He still does marvelous things for us. He can help you and persons you love.

3. How can Jesus help us now?

The Gospel writers saw Jesus ascend into heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead. Jesus told them he would send the Holy Spirit to live in them so they would have power to know God and do great works for him in teaching and healing. The Holy Spirit came as Jesus said. His apostles

guide us in the process. And we should thank him for every healing that comes even if we think it is from medicines or drugs! Every good thing comes from God. Prayer is always good and helpful.

**There may be more ailments listed in the Gospels. These are not all the references! If you use the NIV Study Bible in your study, you will see that parallel reports of healings in the other Gospels are listed at the head of the paragraph. Please take time to do your own study. I suggest that you do not read the references in your message. Simply describe the great number of illnesses of different kinds that Jesus healed.

(leaders) taught and prayed for the healing of people as Jesus predicted. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us of the miraculous healings the apostles performed in the powerful name of Jesus.

Jesus is alive in heaven as our high priest. But Jesus is also present with us through his Holy Spirit. Through Jesus God gives us many blessings, including healing our physical and mental illnesses. Think about these ways by which we should follow Jesus and trust in him today:

Take every illness to Jesus Christ in prayer because he cares for us and has power to heal us. Be patient and continue praying if healing does not come right away. God is pleased when we patiently and persistently ask him again and again for what we need.

- Listen to the Holy Spirit who teaches us the ways of God. Ask him if there is a lesson for you to learn through your weakness, pain and illness.
- Repent of any known sin. Some illnesses may be a result of your carelessness, or they may be a message to you that God wants to correct you. Listen and learn!
- Ask for strength to endure the pain and fears you have about your illness. Ask for God to help you with the limitations and disabilities you are experiencing.
- Do not give up. Do not be angry. Tell God what you feel you need and want, but honor and love him even if you are not helped as much as you want.
- Be grateful for every day you are alive. Make the most of them. Death is inevitable. No one is ever healed completely! Age and illness will take all of us to the grave some day, unless Jesus comes before that time.
- Remember the words of the Apostle Paul who suffered from illnesses and hardships for many years:
“Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Jesus Christ, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand.”

Philippians 4:6,7 CEV

Note: In the next message we will look at the matter of medicines, doctors, surgery and other healing practices today. Encourage your listeners to listen to the whole series on Jesus and healing.

Explanatory Notes:

Christian Healing: Medicines or Miracles of God?

Theme: God heals physical and mental illnesses and ailments through miracles, medicines, and skilled doctors.

Bible Verses: Matthew 8:16,17 (compare Isaiah 53:5)
Psalm 139:13,14 CEV and NIV (See also: 1 Peter 2:24;
Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 12:9 CEV)

Introduction:

When your people greet each other do they usually ask about each other's health? Listen to these greetings in several languages:

“How are you?” (English, Urdu – Pakistan)

“Is your health good? Are you strong like iron?” (Sudanese Arabic)

“Is everything good?” (Murle people, Sudan)

“How does it seem to be going?” (Spanish – Mexico)

“How are you feeling?” (Chol – Mexico)

Our health is so important. The number of diseases and ailments that trouble people daily seem to be countless.

In the last 100 years we have learned very much about diseases, medicines, and many kinds of surgeries. The list is so big that it is alarming! A home medical dictionary in English will have at least 800 pages in it describing kinds of diseases, their symptoms, the troubles they cause and the treatments that might cure them.

What about you today? How are you? What do you do when you are sick? Today there are hospitals and clinics in most communities. Governments and Christian hospitals provide healing services and advice to sufferers. Most people including Christians have learned to buy medicines, vitamins and traditional remedies. Sick people go to surgeons for big and small operations. At the same time, even some Christians in times of desperation go back to traditional ways of seeking for healing through sacrifices, ceremonies and the advice of shamans.

Where is God in these changes for healing of our sicknesses? I am sure you have asked yourself that question.

1. Jesus forgives all sins and heals many sick people.

Two thousand years ago a man by the name of Jesus started teaching and healing people in the country of Palestine (Israel). His teaching and healing caused great excitement and controversy. This is just one of many reports about him:

That evening many people with demons in them were brought to Jesus. And with only a word he forced out the evil spirits and healed everyone who was sick. So God's promise came true, just as the prophet Isaiah had said,

*"He healed our diseases
and made us well."*

Matthew 8:16-17 CEV

Peter, a follower of Jesus who knew him very well, described Jesus this way:

"(Jesus) Christ carried the burden of our sins. He was nailed to the cross so that we would stop sinning and start living right. By his cuts and bruises you are healed."

2 Peter 2:24 CEV

Notice that the report says, "...with only a word he forced out the evil spirits and healed everyone who was sick."

Wouldn't you like to have a healer like Jesus in your town? What can Jesus do for us now? Jesus is alive in heaven at the side of God. From there he sees us, hears us and loves us. He knows all about us, the good and the bad. The Bible teaches us to go to Jesus in prayer by faith asking him to forgive our sins and heal our bodies and spirits.

He will forgive all our sins whenever we ask him. (1 John 1:7-9) Forgiveness is more important than healing. We need healing in our sinful hearts first. Our sins often cause our sickness. So, step # 1 for healing is, ask Jesus to forgive your sins, and he will.

Jesus has power to heal any disease. If you think demons are bothering you, ask him and he will force them to leave you. (Notice in Mark how often he mentions the casting out of demons in chapter 1: verses 23-27, 32-34, 39. Mark was impressed with Jesus' power and we need to remember this as Mark did!) Jesus wants us to be healthy in body and mind so we can be strong to obey him and love others through acts of kindness.

2. Does Jesus heal everyone completely who prays to him? No, he doesn't. Let me explain:

- Jesus heals all kinds of diseases all around the world. Nothing is too hard for him.
- But he most often heals people where there are only a few believers as a special sign of his power and love. Jesus shows his love for people not just by sending his message of love but by showing his love when he heals distressed people.

Illustration: Bishop Bul in the Sudan (Africa) reports that many people are being healed in the harsh, undeveloped grasslands where his people herd cattle and grow sorghums for food. Because of civil war during the past 20 years, most Christian hospitals and government clinics are no longer open. Great numbers of the cattle have been killed or stolen. The grass and grains do not grow because of little rain. Jesus is answering their prayers today! These healings have showed God's forgiving love and his gracious healing power to these people who ignored him before. More and more people have turned to Jesus as never before. By the thousands they are believing him and praising him in great assemblies of worship, dance and song.

God heals believers so they will feel compelled to tell others of Jesus' power and love. Whenever anyone is healed by Jesus, that person should praise God so that many others will realize who God is and how much he loves them also!

3. Remember these points which describe the different ways by which God gives us healing:

- A. No healing makes a person 100% new and totally without disease. We know from medical studies that

our bodies have thousands of germs (micro-organisms, microbes, bacteria) in them. Medical workers know how to see and examine these germs with a microscope. We cannot see germs with our eyes. Our white blood cells (which we cannot see either) fight and destroy these germs constantly so that we do not become sick. Medicines can help us when our own bodies are not strong enough to fight off the diseases that we get from air, water, and many other things.

B. We all have weaknesses in our bodies, never the same for each person. We get (inherit) these weaknesses from our parents.* Jesus can help us live with some of these weaknesses and be strong in spite of them.

C. We are always in the process of dying while we are living! That doesn't sound good but it is true! Jesus can re-vitalize (give new life) to our bodies, but in this world our youth never comes back!

Years ago explorers came to America looking for "the Fountain of Youth." They wanted to find this water which they believed would make them young again. They never found it. Death is a part of living.

D. Operations by doctors (surgeons) remove bad tissue, tumors and correct abnormal, damaged bodily parts and conditions. But the healing is never perfect! Today there are surgeons who can transplant a heart, kidney, liver and other parts from one body to another. This is amazing. How has this happened? We believe God has blessed these doctors, nurses and technicians with skills to heal people. So, it is not just doctors who are healing. God gives them the ability. God is at work as patients heal from the cuts, bleeding and procedures of the operation. Always remember that God is present whenever healing takes place.

So, we must think carefully about this matter of healing. It is never complete, either by a doctor or by Jesus. But it does stop the powers that are destroying the body. Jesus stops pain, restores strength, and makes a person able to resume normal life again. God heals and takes care of the

*These weaknesses and strengths in our bodies are passed on by what doctors call "genes." These genes make us look like our parents, but they also give us strength and weakness in our bodies. When Jesus heals people he does not change all the genes in a person and make that person like brand new! Medicines cannot do that either. When we feel good and healthy, we say we are well, but we are never totally without disease or weaknesses.

Here is some additional material that might be helpful for your messages on healing:

When different people pray to Jesus for healing, he answers their prayers in different ways. As we have seen, many times Jesus heals people today just as he miraculously did 2,000 years ago.

But sometimes Jesus does not heal us through a direct miracle. Sometimes he uses doctors and medicine to heal us. Some people say that to see a doctor for an illness is a sign that we do not have faith in the healing power of Jesus. But this is not true. It is wise for us to take care of our bodies with exercise, rest and good hygiene. So too, it is wise to care for our bodies with treatments and medicines that medical workers have discovered to be helpful. Many times Jesus uses medical treatments to answer our prayers and re-

people he made! But we know that the best life is still in the future when believers will be with God forever. Then there will be no pain, sickness or death!

4. How does prayer heal? We never know exactly. The writer of Psalm 139 is talking to God, and says,

“You are the one who put me together inside my mother’s body, and I praise you for the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvelous!”
(verses 13-14)

In the last hundred years especially we have learned how complicated and wonderful our bodies and minds are. It is amazing. Doctors have invented thousands of medicines and procedures to bring healing to us. So, we must think carefully of how healing takes place:

A. Most importantly, God wants to heal our spirits. He purifies our thoughts. He reduces our stress and worry. He wants us to pray because prayer brings balance and peace which prevent disease. Anger kills. Love heals. God wants to help us to make good decisions according to his teaching in the Bible. This is the first step. Ask God to forgive your sins, take evil thoughts from you and give you peace of mind.

B. We should pray for doctors, nurses, hospitals, medical research chemical companies that make drugs, and much more. We should pray that rich people, churches and governments will provide for good medical care for everyone. We should pray that people will have enough money to pay for doctors and medicines. We should pray that God will guide the hands of surgeons as they operate.

C. We should also pray that God will heal us without medical treatment. Whenever we are weak, sick, under stress or in a dangerous situations, we should pray first, not last! God prevents sickness and accidents, and he heals.

D. We should pray and think about our life-style – what we eat, how we exercise and work, how we heat,

store us to good health.

The story of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38 is an interesting example. In this story, the prophet Isaiah tells king Hezekiah that God will heal him supernaturally. But he still tells him to apply a poultice of figs (verse 21).

It is important to remember that our faith is in Jesus, not in doctors and human technology. Just because we take medicine or have a surgery doesn't mean we don't need to pray. God is always the Giver of health, no matter what ways he uses to give it. And it is God who has given wisdom, understanding and skill to medical workers. God showed them the medicines he created. God helped them discover treatments that help sick people.

We believe it is God who heals us. For this reason believers in Jesus do not go to shamans or traditional healers. These healers use religious methods for healing that the Bible forbids. Here is what God's law says in Deuteronomy 18:10-14:

When you arrive in the land the LORD your God is giving you, be very careful not to imitate the detestable customs of the nations living there. ¹⁰ For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling or sorcery, or allow them to interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, ¹¹ or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is an object of horror and disgust to the LORD. It is because the other nations have done these things that the LORD your God will drive

screen and ventilate our houses, how we take vacations and rest, how we meditate and pray. We should do this so that we relax and rest in God's strength and not our own powers alone!

E. It is never wrong to pray for a miracle. God expects us to ask him again and again. He is not offended or angry if we ask him again and again. If he does not heal us, we should do what we can to help ourselves through the best medical treatment we can get.

And we should ask God if he is trying to teach us something through our pain and weakness.

F. We should pray that God will be honored and praised because of the ways he heals us. People often forget like the 10 lepers that Jesus healed, and only one returned to thank him! (Luke 17:12) God wants to heal you so that others too will learn of his healing power and his love.

G. Always remember that your body is "God's holy temple." 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20. Take care of your body. Don't let the devil use it for his purposes. Consider your body to be a holy place where the Spirit of God lives.

Were you hoping that I would give you a very simple, fool-proof way of being healed of all your diseases and ailments? It is not that easy. Keep on trusting God each day for whatever you need. He is always ready to hear our prayers about everything that troubles us or makes us weak and afraid. God is pained when we have pain. Don't ever hesitate to ask him for healing.

them out ahead of you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God. ¹⁴ The people you are about to displace consult with sorcerers and fortune-tellers, but the LORD your God forbids you to do such things.

Sometimes, Jesus doesn't heal us directly. Sometimes he doesn't even heal us through medicine. Sometimes he chooses in his wisdom not to heal us at all. Sometimes he allows people to remain ill, or even to die from their illness. Does this mean God isn't powerful enough to save them? No. Does it mean that Jesus doesn't love them? No. Sometimes the Lord decides it is better for a person not to be healed. We don't understand it. We wish we knew his reasons. We never give up praying to him for healing. But we trust him and know that he is all-wise. He does what is best for each person, even if it seems contrary to our own wishes.

We all must die eventually. Jesus healed sick people and even raised some from the dead. But even those people still died. Even the most miraculous healings only delay what is inevitable (unavoidable). But there is one more healing that we have not mentioned yet. And it is the greatest healing of all.

The Bible tells us that Jesus rose from the dead with a perfect body. He lives forever. And the Bible promises that everyone who believes and follows Jesus will one day be raised from the dead. They will be given perfect bodies. Never again will they experience sickness or sorrow. And they will live and reign with him forever.

Explanatory Notes:**ALL SICKNESSES: WHO PRAYS, WHEN AND HOW?**

Theme: The Bible urges believers to join in prayer for all sick persons who should also confess any known sins at the same time.

Bible Verses: James 5:14-16; Acts 5:12-16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-10a CEV

Introduction:

This message is for every person who is sick! It is also a message for believers in Jesus who are sick or who have friends that are sick. Sicknesses are troubling! Mental sickness and disturbances caused by demons make us sad and worried. Physical illnesses make us weak and uncomfortable. They make us worry about death.

How much does God care about all sicknesses? He cares so much that James, the brother of Jesus and one of the leading apostles, writes clearly that we should always pray together promptly for any sick person. We will read his words in a minute!

What concerns do you have today about sicknesses, your own or others'? I am sure this message will help you understand what Christians should believe and do when friends or family are sick with any kind of sickness in mind or body.

1. What should a believer in Jesus do if sick? Listen carefully to the plain instructions of James, Jesus' brother:

If you are sick, ask the church leaders to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. If you have faith when you pray for sick people, they will get well. The Lord will heal them, and if they have sinned, he will forgive them. If you have sinned, you should tell each other what you have done.

Jesus has compassion for you. He wants to forgive you of your sins. He wants to free you from your illnesses. He wants to give you strength to do good to others. And he wants to give you eternal life. Will you put your life and health in his hands today?

Then you can pray for one another and be healed. The prayer of an innocent person is powerful, and it can help a lot.

James 5:14-16, CEV

James' instructions are very clear and plain! Don't you agree? This is what we learn from him:

A. If you are sick, ask other Christians to pray with you and for you right away. Don't delay. If you attend a church that has elders or leaders, ask them to come and pray with you.

B. James says "anoint with olive oil." Olive oil was used in worship ceremonies by the Jews in the temple. It was a symbol of thanksgiving for a good harvest. It was burned in lamps as a sign of light and God's truth. It was also used as a medicine for stomach disorders and wounds. But why does James tell us to anoint with oil? Because it is a visible sign of faith. It is a sign of God's power to heal. What if you don't have olive oil? Use some other cooking oil, or any oily-like product you may buy at the chemist (pharmacy). The oil is a symbol of the presence and power of God.

Should you anoint a person a second time if he or she is not healed? I think God would be happy to have you do that. It is a sign of your faith in him and your deep need for his help. God is never offended when we keep on praying.* Repeated prayer proves our trust in him.

*Jesus tells us to keep on praying in Matthew 7:7. In the original language Jesus' words mean 'keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.' (see also Luke 18:1-8).

C. But what about our sins? James says clearly, "If you have sinned, you should tell each other...Then you can pray and be healed." v.16 This does not mean that we must tell all the details of our private thoughts and sins. But first we must "come clean" before God. We must approach him honestly and humbly. An open and honest confession helps us to put our sins behind us.

An 'innocent person' tries sincerely to be free of all sin. You probably know some Christians who try hard to keep themselves free from sin. God hears and honors the prayers of such a person. Invite people who try to follow the ways of Jesus carefully to pray with you. That is always a good action!

Illustration: The Chol people in Mexico live in distant villages where there is no doctor, clinic or pharmacy. They suffer from many sicknesses. On Sundays before church and on other days the elders (leaders) of the church go together to the homes of sick persons. They read verses from the Bible. They talk a bit. They sing a hymn. They anoint the sick person with oil. Then they pray together. They have seen God heal many people year after year!

Illustration: In America there are ‘healing meetings’ in some churches. I attended a meeting where the leaders spoke to the large group of people gathered. They said, “Come to be healed. But, first, our leaders will talk with you about your faith in God and how you are living. If there is sin, we will ask you to tell it to us and God, and then we will pray that you will be healed.”

I think that is a good way to have such a meeting.

God wants us to be well in spirit and in our bodies. God’s healing is free, but we cannot ignore his holiness when we come to him. Guilt and sin weaken our bodies. So, we need to be right with God before we ask him to heal us.

2. What about the “gift of healing,” faith healers and traveling or TV evangelists?

I want you to hear the words of the Bible, first from Acts 5: 12-16 CEV. This report tells how God healed many people when the followers of Jesus went into cities and villages after Jesus had returned to heaven:

The apostles worked many miracles and wonders among the people. All of the Lord’s followers often met in the part of the temple known as Solomon’s Porch. No one outside their group dared join them, even though everyone liked them very much. Many men and women started having faith in the Lord. Then sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats. It was hoped that Peter would walk by, and his shadow would fall on them and heal them. A lot of people living in the towns near Jerusalem brought those who were sick or troubled by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

A. Notice that “the apostles worked many wonders and miracles among the people.” “A lot of people....brought those who were sick or troubled by evil spirits, and they were all healed..” A “wonder” means the people were surprised. They did not expect what was happening before their eyes. They considered these healings to be ‘miracles’. These acts of God’s power were signs of his presence in the healing. What was the result of these healings? Unbelievers, seeing what God did, “many men and women started having faith in the Lord.”

Every time God does something good, our faith should increase. And God should be recognized and honored for what happens. Keep this in mind as you pray by yourself and with others for healing. A healing is a witness of how Jesus saves people from sin and sickness. Unbelievers see what happens and many turn to believe in Jesus.

B. Notice that Acts says that “it was hoped that Peter would walk by, and his shadow would fall on them and heal them” (v. 15). Were the people superstitious? They probably were! They had many false hopes and beliefs. This may remind you of traditional healers who claim to have powers to heal. It may remind you of questions you have about special healing meetings in cities or on TV. What should we think about them?

Before I give you my answer, I want to read a few verses from 1 Corinthians 12:4-10a CEV. Listen carefully please:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.

The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick or the power to work mighty miracles.

These words teach us about the “gift of healing.” This word gift refers to special abilities which God gives to believers.

Should a sick person do what TV evangelists ask them to do? Every person should decide how they will act. God always accepts sincere people. What they think and believe is more important than what they may do while praying or worshiping. It is always right to pray and admit sins. God forgives. God heals. All credit and honor should be given to him and not to persons who claim to have the gift of healing.

These gifts are special skills in ministry which God distributes among believers so they can help each other and non-believers. All Christians should pray for healing. But God gives the gift of healing only to people whom he chooses. Those who receive it should use it to bring both spiritual, emotional and physical healing to people. They should give all praise to God for his acts of healing. They should be humble and not seek for fame and recognition. Sometimes “faith healers” do not follow these instructions from the Bible. Jesus was a very humble healer. He brought glory to God and not to himself. So, if a person feels he has the gift of healing, he should use it. Others should ask God to help them recognize believers who have the gift of healing. These “gifted” believers should be invited to join in prayers for healing. They should lead others to pray with them.

Missionaries and Christian leaders in the ‘majority world’ (nations outside of Europe and North America) report that many healings take place especially in places where there is no medical service available, and where people are only beginning to hear the Gospel and believe. So they see these healings as “sings and wonders” that compel people to believe in Jesus. So it is clear that God is doing miracles today, but not every time we pray for one. We should continue to pray when sickness continues. Learning patience in continuing prayer is in itself a blessing. We do not always see it that way.

Conclusion: So, what should we do about spiritual and physical sicknesses? We should always pray promptly and repeatedly, confessing our sins and asking God to show his power and love by healing us. We must ask God to give us discernment (insight, wisdom) about big healing meetings and TV evangelists. God does use them. We must be sure that we feel right about what we do and how we do it. Remember always: God loves to heal us. He takes no delight in our suffering, our limited powers of movement, our emotional upsets and our fears. He is the God of peace who sent Jesus to bring peace and healing to the world. He is still doing that.

Here is an important question which many people are asking: **“How many people are really healed in these healing meetings?”** The book *The Healing Power of Prayer* (year 2003), written by two doctors, reports about one study of the results of healing meetings. Of 586 persons with a serious disease or physical condition who were prayed for, 84 reported that a special healing by God took place. That is 14.3 percent which is a wonderful result. The Bible tells us that Jesus healed all who came to him and the apostles healed all that were brought to them as recorded in Acts 5 which we have read above.

People today must seek God when healings do not come. There is no simple answer to why God does not heal as he did in New Testament times. See the message in this series, “Christian Healing: Medicines or Miracles of God?” (# 7c) for a fuller discussion of how God heals today through both medical procedures and also through distinct acts of his power in healing apart from drugs and doctors.

Explanatory Notes:**FAITH, FEAR AND FAMILIES**

Theme: Christ removes our fear of our deceased ancestors. He teaches us to respect our ancestors but to worship and serve him only.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:**

Person 1: Good morning, _____ [**Producer:** provide names for your speakers and use them occasionally to make the conversation sound more natural]. I want to ask you about something that has been bothering me.

Person 2: What is it, _____?

1: We are traditional people. We have great respect for our deceased ancestors. We pray to them and offer them gifts on altars. We listen to their wisdom. They are and always will be part of our family. It would be shameful for us to neglect those who went before us.

Well, I have been reading the Bible you gave me. I like a lot of what I am reading. Jesus is very interesting. But the Bible seems very negative when it talks about ancestors.

2: Can you think of any examples?

1: Yes. I read these verses this week:

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:26, NRSV

You were rescued from the useless way of life that you learned from your ancestors.

1 Peter 1:18, CEV

****Producers:** Fear and worship of deceased ancestors is a sensitive subject in many parts of the world. This message is written as a dialogue to introduce the subject in a gentle but confident way. If you use this dialogue you will need to change the names, details and conversational style to make them interesting and meaningful to your listeners.

In many Eastern cultures, the world is seen as a closed system. They teach that dead people do not leave the world to go to a different place. Dead people return to the world, but in a different form.

And in many of the same cultures, people believe that the parent-child relationship continues after the parent dies. If the parents were good people in this life, the child should pay respect to them in order to receive aid from them. If the parents were evil in life, the child should try to help them turn from evil.

But the Bible teaches that there is a vast distance between the living and dead people. We are on earth and they are not. We cannot communicate with them. The Bible says that believers who died are with Jesus. The Bible does not say clearly where deceased unbelievers are before the final judgment.

And throughout the New Testament I read that all people are evil and that we must cast off our old ways of living and become new people. If I become a Christian, must I hate my family and reject the ways of my ancestors?

How can your messages help your listeners to understand the good news of Jesus? How can your messages address the concerns your listeners have for their deceased relatives?

2: No, you most definitely should *not* hate your family, your parents or your ancestors. But your understanding of them may need to change.

1: Tell me what you mean. And tell me what those verses mean.

2: **First of all, the Bible says that every person is made in God's image.** There is much good in each person that we can be glad about, including our ancestors. Many parts of the Bible speak very highly of ancestors who had great faith. The Bible encourages us to look at their faith and imitate them (Hebrews 12:1, 2 Timothy 1:3-5). Many times the Bible calls our attention to the example of faithful forefathers.

1: I remember now that the Bible talks about following in the footsteps of faithful people.

2: We believe that the best way to honor our forefathers is not to worship them or pray to them or give them gifts on altars. We should give all our worship and prayers only to God. The best way to honor our forefathers is to remember the admirable things they said and did, and imitate their example.

The second thing the Bible tells us about our parents is that we are to honor them. In fact, this is one of God's ten great commandments.

1: This is true. I remember reading in the Bible, "Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12)." But why, then, does the Bible also say we need to hate our mother and father? I don't understand that.

2: Jesus used vivid, emotional words in order to shock

his listeners and get their attention. He used the word ‘hate’ to mean ‘love them less.’ What Jesus meant was that **we should love God more than anyone in the world, even our mothers and fathers.** If our parents tell us to do something that is against God’s will, we need to obey God, not our parents. God’s authority is higher than the authority of our family members.

- 1: That makes sense. Sometimes our parents ask us to do things we know are wrong. Usually we do what they say. I see now that God says we shouldn’t do this. But what about the verses that talk about rejecting the “useless way of life” we learned from our ancestors?
- 2: That’s the third point we need to understand. **The Bible says that all people in the world have turned against God.** There is much good in people, but there is also much bad in us, too. It is true of us. It was also true of our ancestors. The Bible says “the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). All people sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23).

But Jesus has come to save people from sin and evil. That is the fourth important point to see.

The Bible says,

God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful. But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life’s blood, we will also be kept safe from God’s anger. Even when we were God’s enemies, he made peace with us, because his Son died for us.

Romans 5:8-10, CEV

The Bible doesn’t say that everything our ancestors ever did was wrong. They surely did many good things. We should not imitate *everything* our ancestors did, only those things which are good.

What **the Bible tells us is that we, and they, were separated from God by sin. And now God in his kindness calls everyone to enjoy a new fellowship (friendship, communion) with him by believing in his Son, Jesus Christ.**

- 1: You said we can be rejoined to God by believing in Jesus. But my ancestors never heard of Jesus. Will they be rejoined to God?
- 2: That question is more difficult. The Bible doesn't give an answer to that. I think the best thing to do is commit our ancestors to God's kindness and justice. **The Bible says that God is a perfect judge who always judges fairly.** Listen to these Bible verses:

*Command the ocean to roar
with all of its creatures,
and the earth to shout
with all of its people.
Order the rivers
to clap their hands,
and all of the hills
to sing together.
Let them worship the LORD!
**He is coming to judge
everyone on the earth,
and he will be honest and fair.***
Psalm 98:7-9, CEV

- 1: I think I can trust God to do what is right. I will not worry about what will happen to my ancestors. I cannot change that. It sounds like I need to be more concerned with what happens to ME!
- 2: That is absolutely right. The Bible says that in the past, God overlooked people's ignorance, but now he calls all people everywhere to turn to him (Acts 17:30).
- 1: You have given very wise answers to my questions. I have only one more for you today. Why don't Christians believe that our dead ancestors move among us as spirits? Why don't they believe that

they can hurt us or help us?

- 2: The Bible says that believers who have died are with God in heaven. They watch what is happening here on earth (see Revelation, chapters 4-5, 7). The Bible doesn't tell us where the other people who died are.

The Bible also warns us not to try to speak with dead people. This is because evil spirits try to trick us. They pretend to be our ancestors. They use our grief for our ancestors to deceive and control us. God does not want us to be fooled by evil spirits. He tells us that living people and dead people can't speak to each other.

The Bible also tells us that if we are believers in Jesus Christ, we don't need to be afraid of anyone, even a deceased person. Here is the Bible's promise:

In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Romans 8:37-39, CEV

[Please conclude with an appropriate prayer of thanksgiving for the memory of our ancestors. Ask God to help you and your listeners make your ancestors proud by doing what is right—believing in Jesus]

Explanatory Notes:

OUR WORLD BELONGS TO A GOOD GOD

Theme: God created the earth and it is still good. Believers need not fear so-called evil places.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:

Is there a place that fills you with great fear and terror? People in all parts of the world have believed that certain places are evil. They say we must avoid these places or bad luck will come upon us.

- Some fear cemeteries and burial grounds. They say that evil spirits visit there.
- Others fear places that are associated with religious ceremonies. They say these places are holy ground and it is dangerous to walk there.
- Some fear places where bad things happened in the past. They say, “I don’t like that room. That is the room where a young woman was murdered.”
- Some fear ancient ruins and abandoned homes.
- Some fear dark caves, deep rivers, large lakes and high mountains.

What does the Bible say about this? Are there places where believers should never go? Are there parts of the earth that should fill us with fear? Do evil spirits live in and control parts of the earth?

I have good news for you. The Bible says we do not need to be afraid. I want to tell you **the story of what the Bible says about the earth**. Then you will see that you do not need to fear any place on earth!

1. God created the earth good.

The story begins at the very beginning of all things. The Bible tells us **that God, who is good, created the earth and it was good**. He made the water, the land, the air, the animals, plants and people, too. Everything belongs to him. When he finished making the world God looked at what he made and saw that it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

The world God made is a good world because he is a good God. There is nothing bad in him. Some people think that God can do both good and evil. This is not true! The God who created the world is absolutely holy and good. He cannot and will not do evil.

2. Human disobedience made the world a dangerous place.

So why is the world such a dangerous place? How did the good world go bad?

The Bible tells us that **God put the first man and woman in control of the world.** He told them to rule the world for him. But **they disobeyed God**, and he punished them. Part of their punishment was that **God cursed the world over which they ruled.** Here is what God said to them:

...the ground will be under a curse because of what you did. As long as you live, you will have to struggle to grow enough food. Your food will be plants, but the ground will produce thorns and thistles. You will have to sweat to earn a living; you were made out of soil, and you will once again turn into soil.

Genesis 4:17-19, CEV

The world became a dangerous place because of the disobedience of our first human parents. Evil spirits began to rule over the world God made. They did this by controlling the people whom God placed in charge of the earth. People misuse the earth in ways that makes Satan and the demons happy. The Bible calls Satan the “ruler of this world.”*

*John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

3. Is that the end of the story? Was God defeated? No! There is good news.

A. First, God is still in control of the physical world. God put the world under a curse, but he still controls it. He controls the sun and the rain. He feeds the animals and plants (Matthew 6:26). He gives the flowers their beauty (Matthew 6:28-30). He decides when and where each person is born (Acts 17:26). He decides whether

people and nations will be successful or unsuccessful. He supplies our needs. He decides when we will die. In all these ways, God is in control of the world. And God is very good. He uses his power over the world to help people and save them.

B. Second, God has begun to make the world a better place again. The Bible says that God will one day take away his curse from the earth. He will purify the world with fire and make it new again.* He will free it from the harmful effects of Satan and the evil spirits. And he will give it to people who believe in Jesus.

*See 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Long ago God promised the descendants of one man, Abraham, would inherit the entire world (Romans 4:13). The Bible says that Abraham's true descendants are not his physical children but all people who imitate Abraham's sincere faith by believing in Jesus.** **So, people who believe in Jesus are Abraham's true descendants, and the earth will belong to them.**

**Romans 4:11, 16,
Galatians 3:7.

4. God uses us to extend his rule over the world. We don't have to wait until Jesus returns some day in the future to see the world become a better place. *We can make the world a place where God rules now.* An important Christian thinker named Abraham Kuyper once said, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine, this belongs to me!'" **Faithful followers of God strive to fill all of the earth with the good news of the rule of God. Like the first man and woman, we rule our world for God.**

- We submit to Jesus as the King and Ruler of our thoughts, words and deeds. If God is to be king over the world, he must first be king over our lives.
- We strive to make our homes, our churches, our communities and our nations places where God's will is obeyed and his love and righteousness are enjoyed by everyone.
- We go into all the earth to call people of all nations to submit to Jesus as their Lord and King.

Extra note for producers: Some Christians teach that demons are assigned to territories or areas of the world. These Christians claim that believers need to drive demons out of each room, each house and each city through prayer. Some of them hold prayer marches around neighborhoods and cities. They also do what they call 'spiritual mapping': they research different cities to determine what vices and evil influences dominate them, then they create special maps based on their findings.

These Christians base their beliefs on Daniel 10:13-21,

By doing these things we expand God's kingdom on the earth and gain victories over the devil and his evil spirits. We give back to God what belongs rightfully to him.

When we do these things, Jesus gives us this promise:

"I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20, NLT

Conclusion:

We have no reason to fear any place on the earth.

Why not?

- **Every inch of the earth** belongs to the good God who made it.
- He has promised us a wonderful hope: All of us who believe in Jesus that we will inherit **the earth**.
- Until then, Jesus promises to be with us as we go **into all the earth** with his message of hope, so that even now the people of **the earth** will come under his good rule and authority.

This is both our hope and our mission: that "**the earth** will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14 NIV).

in which the archangel Michael battles the 'spirit princes' of the kingdom of Persia and Greece.

We mention this teaching because you may encounter it in your ministry. We admire the determination of these Christians to battle Satan through prayer. But we believe it is best to emphasize that the goal of evil spirits is to control and deceive *people*, not control areas of *land*. If they can deceive someone into thinking they are in control of an area of land, they will. But they are not in control. God is!

Rather than map cities or march around neighborhoods, we should spend our time telling people the good news of Jesus, loving them with the love of Christ, praying for them, and setting an example for them by our holy living and service.

Explanatory Notes:**WHAT'S BEHIND THE IDOLS?**

Theme: People use idols to control the unseen world, but in truth, the unseen world uses idols to enslave people.

Bible Verses: Various.

Introduction:

One of God's Ten Great Commands is that his followers should not bow down to idols or use them in any way to worship him. But many people all over the world worship idols or use idols to worship gods and goddesses.

- They say idols are visual reminders of their gods.
- They say idols help them to imagine their god while they are praying to them.
- Idols help them feel close to their gods.
- Since we cannot see God, they say idols give them something they can feel, see and touch in worship.

Many people find idols pleasing because they think they can use the idol to control or manipulate their god.

- They can take the idol with them into battle to ensure victory.
- They can offer sacrifices to it so the god will perform some favor for them.
- Some even coerce their gods by threatening to mistreat the idol!*
- Many people who worship idols claim that their gods have answered their prayers, often miraculously.

*Some people in South America turn their idols on their heads and threaten to keep the idol that way until the dead saint they pray to provides a lover for them!

We all wish we had better control over our lives. We wish we could ensure our success, prosperity, fame, and love. We wish we could prevent illnesses and accidents. So it is natural that idolatry would be appealing.

Idol worship was certainly appealing to the people of Israel in the Old Testament! They were constantly tempted to idolatry by the nations around them. Sometimes even the kings promoted the worship of idols. Here is one example:

[King] Manasseh disobeyed the LORD by following the disgusting customs of the nations that the LORD had forced out of Israel. He rebuilt the local shrines that his father Hezekiah had torn down. He built altars for the god Baal and set up a sacred pole for worshiping the goddess Asherah, just as King Ahab of Israel had done. And he faithfully worshiped the stars in heaven. In the temple, where only the LORD was supposed to be worshiped, Manasseh built altars for pagan gods and for the stars. He placed these altars in both courts of the temple, and even set up the pole for Asherah there. Manasseh practiced magic and witchcraft; he asked fortunetellers for advice and sacrificed his own son. He did many sinful things and made the LORD very angry.

Years ago the LORD had told David and his son Solomon:

Jerusalem is the place I prefer above all others in Israel. It belongs to me, and there I will be worshiped forever. If my people will faithfully obey all the commands in the Law of my servant Moses, I will never make them leave the land I gave to their ancestors.

But the people of Judah disobeyed the LORD. They listened to Manasseh and did even more sinful things than the nations the LORD had wiped out.

One day the LORD said to some of his prophets: King Manasseh has done more disgusting things than the Amorites, and he has led my people to sin by forcing them to worship his idols.

2 Kings 21:2-11, CEV

If idol worship is so appealing to people, why does God hate it so much? The obvious answer is that God is the only God. He does not want us to worship other gods because he is the only God. Worship should be given only to him. Listen to the Bible's words:

Even though food is offered to idols, we know that none of the idols in this world are alive. After all, there is only one God. Many things in

heaven and on earth are called gods and lords, but none of them really are gods or lords. We have only one God, and he is the Father. He created everything, and we live for him. Jesus Christ is our only Lord. Everything was made by him, and by him life was given to us.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6, CEV

But there is something more that needs to be said. At the beginning of Israel's history, Moses told the Israelites something very important about idols. Here are his words:

*You made God jealous and angry by worshiping disgusting idols and foreign gods. You offered sacrifices **to demons**, those useless gods that never helped you, new gods that your ancestors never worshiped. You turned away from God, your Creator; you forgot the Mighty Rock, the source of your life.*

Deuteronomy 32:16-18, CEV

What Moses is saying is that the gods that the nations worship with their idols are not gods at all. *They are demons*—evil spirits who hate God and his followers! The Bible says the same thing in another place:

*Am I saying that either the idols or the food sacrificed to them is anything at all? No, I am not! That food is really sacrificed **to demons and not to God**. I don't want you to have anything to do with demons.*

1 Corinthians 10:19-20, CEV

The Bible tells us that there is a large army of evil angels, called demons, that rebelled against God. They do not want anyone to worship God. They want all people to be trapped in sin and misery.

Sometimes these demons play tricks on people who worship idols. They answer their prayers so that the people think there is a god listening in the idol. This leads them to stronger devotion to false gods.

Isn't it strange? People worship idols because they think that this will help them control the unseen world. But in truth, unseen demonic forces use idols to control and deceive the minds of these people.

God does not want anyone to be deceived by these demons anymore. He wants us to know the truth. He forbids the worship or use of idols because he loves us and wants us to be free from the traps and lies of evil spirits. He wants us to know him as Father. He is a personal God who considers every believer as his true child.

If you worship idols or use idols in your worship of God, I plead with you to stop. Don't be deceived any longer. Throw away your idols.* Worship God in spirit and in truth. Discover the goodness of the one true God.

God can't be confined to an image. And God can't be controlled or manipulated by people. But God is all-powerful. He is in control. He will shower his blessings on you if you love and follow him. I encourage you to become one of the millions of people who have "*turned away from idols to serve the true and living God*" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer]

***Producers:** Do not encourage your listeners to destroy idols that do not belong to them. This would result in violence and resentment from unbelievers. Each person has to destroy his or her own idols. Believers often do this together. It may or may not be done openly in public.

The story of Gideon in Judges 6:25ff might suggest to some readers that it is permissible to destroy other peoples' idols. But Gideon's situation is different from us for three reasons:

1. Gideon was directly told by God to destroy his father's idol.
2. While other families worshiped the idol, it belonged to Gideon's family. As a member of the family he had the right and the responsibility to tear it down.
3. Gideon was a part of Israel, a nation ruled directly by God's commands. It was illegal to have idols in Israel, so Gideon was obeying the law. We live in nations in which idols are not illegal, but destroying other peoples' property is illegal. We would be disobeying the law if we destroyed someone else's property even if it were an idol.

Explanatory Notes:**MODERN-DAY PROPHETS**

Theme: Jesus calls his followers to oppose the devil by bringing justice to societies and nations.

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Person 1: Good morning, _____!*

Person 2: What's so good about it, _____?* Isn't the world horrible?

1: Why are you so upset?

2: I was thinking about all the problems in our country. I love our country very much. That's why it makes me angry to see the poverty, crime, corruption, racism and fighting we have here. I hope Jesus returns soon. He will put an end to all this immorality and injustice in our world!

1: Yes, the Bible promises us that Jesus will come back and bring peace and justice for the whole world. But you know, we can do our part now.

2: What do you mean?

1: Well, we can make our villages and our country a better place. As followers of Jesus, we can get involved in efforts to make conditions better.

2: Oh, I don't believe that! The Bible says that this world is going to get more and more evil.* Why should we try to make the world a better place when it's only going to get worse? I think it's better for me to spend my time praying, reading my Bible and going to church meetings.

1: I'm glad you pray, read your Bible and attend worship services. That's wonderful. But part of what you say doesn't make sense. Let me ask you this: You believe that you have sinful desires in you, don't you?

*Producers, give names to your speakers and use them occasionally so that the conversation will sound more natural to your listeners.

*For example:
Matthew 24:6-28;
2 Timothy 3:1-5

- 2: Yes, the Bible says we have a natural tendency to disobey God every day.
- 1: But even though you believe that, you don't just say, "Well, I'm going to sin anyway, so I might as well stop trying so hard to be good." No, you try to do what is right. You try to obey God. Isn't that right?
- 2: Yes, of course!
- 1: It's the same way with our world. Yes, there is a lot of evil in the world. Yes, some problems will get worse. But we shouldn't just give up. We must do something about it.
- 2: You mean like praying for our leaders, giving food and clothing to needy people, and helping people become followers of Jesus?
- 1: Yes, that's a great start. But there's so much more we can do:
- We can pray for our leaders. *But some of us can also become leaders.* We can serve and guide our communities into paths that give honor to God. And all of us can become good citizens, giving an example to others of how to live.
 - We can give aid to needy people as you said, *but we can also defend them* when they are being treated unfairly.
 - We can change people by urging them to follow Jesus as you said. *But we can also change communities, businesses and governments* by urging them to follow Jesus. We can shine the light of Jesus in every part of our society. We can try to change unjust laws. We can encourage businesses to stop corrupt business practices.
- 2: I am not sure about that. Where does the Bible tell us to be involved in the governments of this world?
- 1: The Bible talks about kings who ruled for God. The

Bible also talks about prophets, messengers from God who urged kings and societies to return to God's ways. These kings and prophets serve as examples for us today. Participation in society is not a bad idea at all! It's a natural part of following God!

2: But you are talking about the ancient nation of Israel. Israel was a *theocracy*--a nation that God established and directly ruled over. But we are not citizens of that ancient people. Believers are scattered around the world as members of many nations. You and I are citizens of *our* country. That is very different.

1: True, but the Bible also gives us many examples of followers of God who served as politicians in foreign nations or who influenced those nations in other ways.

- Joseph was a high official in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.*
- Daniel was a very important government official in Babylon.**
- Esther married the king of Persia and influenced his decisions.***
- The prophets of Israel and Judah sent messages from God to many foreign nations.****

*Genesis 41:39-40

**Daniel 2:48

***The book of Esther.

****For examples, see the books of Jonah and Nahum; Isaiah 13-23.

These people show us that we can and should share God's wisdom with all of our people by influencing government. It is part of our battle against the devil. The devil wants to bring injustice, immorality and destruction to our people. He wants to take away the order that our government preserves for us. He hates our country and our people! If he can bring division, confusion and corruption to our government, our leaders, or *any* group of people, he will.

*Matthew 5:14-16.

Jesus calls us to be a light to our world.* He calls us to stand firm in our resistance to the devil. He calls us to be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation everywhere we go. Do you remember what God says he requires of us?

2: What's that?

- 1: The Bible says, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act *justly* and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8). The Bible says that true religion is a matter of taking care of widows and orphans (James 1:27). They were the neediest people of society. Acting fairly and promoting fairness and justice in society are very important parts of our Christian faith and responsibility. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says in the Bible about **justice being the heart of true religion.**** People fasted (went without food) as part of their religious faith. Listen now as I read Isaiah's words:

What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like a blade of grass in the wind. You dress in sackcloth [burlap] and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD?

"No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

"If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the LORD will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply.

"Stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the dark-

**Other important verses about the relationship of justice and religion are Amos 5:21-24, Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 7:1-11, Hosea 6:6, Matthew 5:23-24 and Matthew 23. Our worship of God is hypocritical and unpleasing to God if we do not practice justice and kindness in our relationships!

ness around you will be as bright as day. The LORD will guide you continually, watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as the people who rebuild their walls and cities.

Isaiah 58:4-12, NLT

- 2: I am beginning to think you are right. Those are wonderful promises God gives to people who seek to bring justice and mercy to their lands. I can see that my view has been too narrow. Maybe instead of simply waiting for Jesus to come back to fix our country's problems, I should let Jesus' light, love and wisdom shine in my life now. Maybe instead of waiting for a future kingdom (rule, reign) of God, I can extend his kingdom where I am. I can make my village a better place. I can make a difference.
- 1: With the power and guidance of God, I am confident that you will. Praise the Lord!

Explanatory Notes:**“ANGEL OF LIGHT”?**

Theme: One of the works of the devil is to make people blind by deceiving them, but the good news of Jesus can open their eyes

Bible Verses: Various. See below.

Introduction:

“If the Christian faith is true, why doesn’t everyone believe it?” This is a natural question for a person to ask. Why does the preaching of the good news of Jesus meet so much unbelief and opposition? If it is such good news, why don’t more people become believers?

This is not just a problem for Christians. If you are not a believer in Jesus and you are listening to this program, you also know what I am talking about. How many times have you said to yourself, “Why do people do what is wrong? Don’t they know better? Why are people so attracted to what is evil and false and turn away from what is good and true? Are they blind?”

The Bible gives us the answer to the question of unbelief. It tells us that there is an invisible army of evil spirits that works tirelessly to defeat God’s plans. One of their main weapons is deception. They tell lies and deceive people so that people will not understand or believe the truth.

Jesus said this about Satan, the head of this army:

[The devil] has always been a murderer and a liar. There is nothing truthful about him. He speaks on his own, and everything he says is a lie. Not only is he a liar himself, but he is also the father of all lies.

John 8:44, CEV

The Apostle Paul, a leader of the first believers of Jesus, said that Satan “tries to make himself look like an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Paul calls Satan the “god of this world” who “has blinded the minds of unbelievers” so that they “cannot see the light” (2 Co-

inthians 4:4). Most of all he blinds people to the true nature and meaning of Jesus himself.

John, another early Christian leader, says, “That snake, who fools everyone on earth, is known as the devil and Satan.” (Revelation 12:9).

People are blind and confused because Satan and his army of demons tell them lies to trap them in unbelief. In what ways do they do this? In every way possible! Let’s look at **three principal ways Satan tries to trick people with lies:**

1. He makes people fear his power.

All over the world there are people who live in great fear.

- Many people are afraid of gods, spirits, demons and deceased ancestors. They make idols of these beings and they offer sacrifices to them to appease their anger.
- Many are afraid of witch doctors and the curses and magic spells they send out. They buy amulets and charms to defend themselves from curses.
- Many are afraid of special places—caves, rivers, certain houses—where they think evil spirits live.
- Many think they are trapped by fate.* They think it is useless to change their future or improve their lives.
- Many people are afraid of persecution. They fear what people will do and say to hurt them if they accept the Christian faith.

***Fate:** the belief that our future is determined by uncontrollable forces. People who believe in fate think they can’t change their future.

2. A second way the devil deceives people is that he makes evil look appealing.

As we saw, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. This means he wants to make what is bad look good. He makes what is good look bad! He wants people to think that following him is more appealing and beneficial than following God.

People tempt us with evil. They say, “Try this. It isn’t bad. Who cares if everyone says it is wrong. It makes you feel good.” This is part of Satan’s strat-

egy.

Satan even tempts people to worship him. Some people are involved in the occult, witchcraft and Satanic worship. These people worship Satan so that he will give them supernatural powers. For a little bit of power these people are willing to forfeit (surrender, lose) their souls.

3. A third way in which Satan deceives people is that **he causes many people to think he doesn't exist.** Probably some of you listening to this message today are laughing in your heart. You are thinking, "All that talk about Satan and demons and evil powers is just superstitious religion. We are more intelligent than the uneducated people of long ago. Now we know that evil spirits aren't real."

But the devil is real. In these messages we have talked about how he is at work in the world. It is important to understand his power and influence.

- **If we don't understand the devil's methods,** we will think that education and political reform are all that is needed to make a better world. **But if we believe in the devil,** we will be more urgent about battling the evil that enslaves people.
- **If we don't understand the devil's methods,** we will treat temptations merely as personal choices. **But if we believe in the devil,** we will see temptations for what they really are: dangerous traps set by a deadly enemy.

Satan doesn't care if people fear him, love him or think he doesn't exist. His main desire is that people will ignore and reject God's Word. His plan is for people to fall into his trap.

But the good news is that the truth, the message about Jesus, is like a bright light. It shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).

- The light of Jesus exposes the weakness of the things we once feared. We need not fear Satan's power when we live in the light of Jesus.

- Jesus' light also exposes the error of people who teach that good is bad and bad is good.
- Jesus' light also helps us recognize that the devil is active. It helps us see his harmful, dangerous actions against us. Jesus' light illumines a pathway for our feet, so that we can find our way to God and walk on his paths.

“For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

2 Corinthians 4:6, NRSV

*see Genesis 1:3.

Listeners, Satan **PRETENDS** to be an angel of light. But Jesus **IS** the **TRUE** light. He is the very glory of God.

I invite you and urge you to come from the darkness to the light. Don't let yourselves be blinded and deceived by Satan any longer. Discover the truth that will set you free.

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer for God to enlighten the minds of your listeners and free them with the message of the gospel]

Explanatory Notes

STRONG PROTECTION AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL

Theme: We need God's powerful protection because we fight powerful forces of evil.

Bible Verses: Ephesians 6:10-20

People of different nations have different ways of fighting battles. They use different weapons and wear different clothing in battle. In ancient times, Roman soldiers fought with swords, spears and arrows. They wore *armor*—thick pieces of metal that protected their body. They also carried *shields*—large pieces of metal they could hold in front of them for additional protection.

Soldiers know that the more dangerous your enemy is, the more protection you will need. The Bible says that believers in Jesus fight against the most dangerous enemies of all! These enemies are the invisible forces of evil, called demons. They hate God and all people. The Bible says that when we believe in Jesus, God gives us special protection from these evil powers.

Since we fight the most dangerous enemies, we need the best protection we can find! So God gives us the weapons and protective clothing and equipment we need to fight and defeat them. They are not physical guns and helmets. They are spiritual. Here are words from the Bible about the protection God gives to his followers. They were written by Paul, a Christian missionary, to a group of believers who were being persecuted because of their faith in Jesus:

Finally, let the mighty strength of the Lord make you strong. Put on all the armor that God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil's tricks.

We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world. So put on all the armor that God gives.

Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm.

Be ready!

- *Let the truth be like a **belt** around your waist,*
- *And let God's justice protect you like **armor**.*
- *Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like **shoes** on your feet.*
- *Let your faith be like a **shield**, and you will be able to stop all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*
- *Let God's saving power be like a **helmet**, and for a sword use God's message that comes from the Spirit.*

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.

Ephesians 6:10-18, CEV

These verses from the Bible give us bad news and good news:

1. The bad news is that there are evil, unseen forces that oppose us and all people. And these forces are very powerful.

Did you notice all the names they are given in these few verses?

- 'The devil' – the devil was an angel who rebelled against God and turned many angels against God. God punished the devil and all the angels who followed him. Now they do everything they can to turn people away from the one true God.
- 'Forces' – the devil and his angels are very organized, like an army fighting against us.
- 'Authorities, rulers of darkness' and 'powers in the spiritual world.' These evil beings have control over many people. They use their control over people to make the world an evil place. The Bible calls them the 'rulers of this evil world.' But the Bible also tells us that God is far more powerful than they are. He is the one who made the world good. He is the true Ruler of the world. He will soon take away the power and control of these evil beings.

What does this army of invisible forces do to harm us?

- They tempt people with seductive pleasure so that

they will do what is evil. They are the voices in our heads that tell us to do the things we know are wrong.

- They threaten people and frighten people so that they are afraid to do what is right. They are the voices in our heads that tell us that if we do right, people will reject us, and we will lose our jobs, our friends and even our lives.
- They convince people to oppose and persecute people who follow Jesus.
- These demonic powers are liars and murderers. They will do anything they can to oppose the good that God and his followers are doing in all the world.

2. The good news is that these verses from the Bible give us great comfort and confidence. They tell us that God gives us weapons that can protect us from these evil powers.

Just as soldiers in armies put on protective clothing and carry shields, so God gives us protection. Paul listed the different pieces of a soldier's equipment. Let's briefly look at each one:

- A. The belt of truth (verse 14):** Roman soldiers wore thick skirts that protected their thighs (the upper parts of their legs). These skirts were fastened tight around them like a belt. In the same way, the truth protects us from all the lies that the evil armies of the devil use to deceive people. That truth is the message of Jesus. Earlier in this letter Paul writes, "Christ also brought you the *truth*, which is the good news about how you can be saved." (Eph. 1:13) He also writes,

“. . . stop living like stupid, godless people. Their minds are in the dark, and they are stubborn and ignorant and have missed out on the life that comes from God. They no longer have any feelings about what is right, and they are so greedy that they do all kinds of indecent things.

*But that isn't what you were taught about Jesus Christ. **He is the truth**, and you heard about him and learned about him.” (Eph. 4:17-21).*

- B. The next piece of protection is called **the breast-plate of righteousness (verse 14–CEV: “armor”)**. A breastplate was a thick piece of metal that covered and protected a soldier’s chest. When our actions are just, fair and right, they give us confidence and protection. The prophet Daniel lived a righteous life. His enemies sought to harm his reputation, but they could find nothing to criticize about him. Our righteous behavior protects and strengthens us.
- C. The next piece of protection is compared to **shoes (v. 15)**. A good pair of shoes or boots can help a soldier’s feet endure long marches. They can also help a messenger run a long way to deliver an important message. We who believe in Jesus are messengers, too. We have a message of peace. Jesus makes it possible for us to have peace with God. He also brings peace and reconciliation between people.** Our desire to tell this news is like a pair of shoes. It keeps us marching and walking for Jesus.
- D. The next piece of protection is **the shield of faith (verse 16)**. Roman soldiers dipped their arrows in tar (pitch, a flammable liquid) and set them on fire before shooting them. These arrows started deadly fires. Our trust in God will protect us from temptation just as shields protected soldiers from arrows.
- The devil shoots arrows of temptation so that we will do what is wrong. We must have faith that puts out the fires of bad emotions and desires.
 - The devil shoots arrows of fear so that we are afraid to do what is right. But we can have confidence and stand strong because we know that God is there with us to lead us into victory.
- E. God also gives us **salvation (‘saving power’) like a helmet (v. 17)**. Salvation means being rescued or delivered from harm. God offers salvation to everyone who believes the good news about his Son Jesus. What is this good news?
- Jesus died to forgive our sins.
 - Jesus rose from the dead.
 - Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to fight evil.

**See Ephesians 2:11-22 for more information.

- Jesus will come back to judge the world and rule over it.

People who believe this message are saved from sin and the judgment of God. They can stand strong, because salvation protects them. Their future is safe and secure.

- F. The last piece of armor is **the sword* of the Spirit, the Word of God (verse 17)**. This Word of God is the message of Jesus that Paul and the apostles preached. Today we have the writings of the apostles gathered into the New Testament. The Bible's teachings are like a sword. They help us to defeat the devil. They point out the errors in our thinking and our behavior. They direct us to the power and love of God. It is very important to learn well what the Bible says.
- G. Paul doesn't compare prayer to armor, but he mentions **prayer in verses 18-20** as the other important part of our protective armor against Satan. When the devil and his forces attack us, we must turn in prayer to God.

Conclusion:

What wonderful gifts of protection God gives us! We have great enemies, an army of dark, evil forces that seek to harm us. We need the best protection we can get. What will you do with the armor God graciously provides for you? Will you leave it on the ground? Or will you wear it to protect you from the devil?

If you are not a believer in Jesus, I urge you to believe the good news of salvation in Jesus. Only he can offer you the protection you need against the great forces of darkness that threaten and tempt you.

If you are a believer, I encourage you to wear your armor and stand your ground in the great fight against Satan. He is strong, but God's protective power is stronger! You do not need to be a loser in the battle against evil! Stand firm in God's power and win!

VICTORY OVER SATAN

Explanatory Notes

Theme: Believers defeat the devil by working together to spread the good news of Jesus.

Bible Verses: Ephesians 6:10-20

Introduction:

In our last message we saw that the demonic armies of evil that attack us are powerful. We also saw that God's protective power is far greater. It is like protective clothing (or armor). It keeps us safe when the devil attacks us with temptation and fearful threats. We can stand firm, doing what is right and avoiding what is evil. We can do this because we are confident that God protects us and saves us.

All this talk about armor might lead us to think that faith and religion are only about *us*. We might think our job as soldiers is only about *protecting ourselves* from the enemies' attacks, and not about going out to win battles against Satan.

Let's read the Bible verses again and see if that is true. Here are the apostle Paul's words from Ephesians 6:10-20, CEV.

*Finally, let the mighty strength of the Lord **make you strong**. Put on all the armor that God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil's tricks. We are not fighting against humans. **We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world**. So put on all the armor that God gives. Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm.*

*Be ready! Let the truth be like a belt around your waist, and let God's justice protect you like armor. **Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet**. Let your faith be like a shield, and you will be able to stop all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Let God's*

saving power be like a helmet, and for a sword use God's message that comes from the Spirit.

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. Pray that I will be given the message to speak and that I may fearlessly explain the mystery about the good news. I was sent to do this work, and that's the reason I am in jail. So pray that I will be brave and will speak as I should.

When we look carefully, we discover that these verses tell us to do more than just protect ourselves. They tell us to fight *together* and *defeat* the evil one by the power of God. They encourage us to march forward together to victory. Today we want to look at our plan of attack, our armor, and our army.

1. Our Plan of Attack

Every good army has to know exactly what it wants to accomplish. Only then will it be able to plan carefully to reach its goals. What is the goal of Jesus' followers? To spread the good news of Christ. A follower of Jesus will never be satisfied with protecting himself or herself from the attacks of the devil. A follower of Jesus will want to tell people everywhere that Jesus is the Lord [Master, King] of the whole world, and that he died and rose from the dead to rescue people from sin and the devil.

One of the pieces of armor which Paul describes is shoes. Let me read it again:

Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet. (Verse 15)

The apostle Paul wrote these words from prison. Paul was thrown into jail for telling people about Jesus! And he asked the believers in Ephesus to pray for him. But he didn't ask them to pray for his release from prison. So what was his prayer request? Let me read it to you again:

Pray that I will be given the message to speak and

that I may fearlessly explain the mystery about the good news. I was sent to do this work, and that's the reason I am in jail. So pray that I will be brave and will speak as I should. (Verses 19-20)

Paul wants the boldness to speak God's message, because he knows God's message is a powerful sword that cuts through confusion about gods, demon powers and the unseen forces that hurt people. God expects us to speak his truth-giving message to people we meet. When we do, we are thrusting God's sword right into the unseen forces of evil. So we are rescuing people from spiritual ignorance. We show them the real God and destroy false imaginations and the "mystery" of religions.

2. Our Armor

But Satan will not sit still while we attack him. He will fight against us with all his might. He will put thoughts like these into our minds:

"That person will dislike me if I tell him about Jesus. I had better not say anything."

"I'm not smart enough to tell others about the Lord. I will let the pastor do that."

"I am too busy working and having fun to find time to reach out to others."

Satan is strong and clever. We are weak and imperfect. That is why we need to wear the armor of God to fight this battle against Satan. The prophets of Israel described God as a warrior or soldier, wrapping armor around himself to battle against evil.* Now God is all-powerful. He needs no armor. The prophets didn't use this picture of God as a soldier to suggest he is weak and needs protection. No, they used this vivid picture to give courage to the people of Israel—God is a warrior who fights for them.

The verses we read earlier announce something even more amazing: *God is giving his very own armor to us!* We can have great courage because we conquer Satan with the very power and armor of the Lord Almighty: truth, justice, good news of peace, faith, salvation, the

*Producers: see the chart on the final page of this message for these verses. Include some of the verses from Isaiah in your message if that will help your listeners.

Word of God, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Our Army

But that is not all God gives us to win spiritual battles! The Bible calls us to fight together as a team or army. Have you ever felt alone? Have you ever felt like you had no friends? You felt abandoned to fight your battles with no one to help you. The Bible says that God puts everyone who believes in Jesus into a very special family, the church. He surrounds us with people who love us and share our faith in God.

This gives us the courage and the responsibility to work together with other believers to win this war against the devil. God doesn't want individual believers to fight their battles alone. He expects believers to work together, love one another, and pray for each other. All of the commands these Bible verses give us are plural. They are addressed to the whole believing community. We are to stand firm together, to put on the armor together.

The verses go on to say,

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. (Verse 18)

Armies fight best when soldiers work together as a team. In the same way, believers fight Satan more effectively when they work together and support each other. Satan constantly seeks to weaken people who believe in Jesus. He tries to divide them so that they fight against each other. One powerful way they can resist this is by praying for each other. Prayer isn't just a ritual. It is a powerful weapon we have that helps our fellow Christian soldiers and defeats our enemy, the devil.

Conclusion:

I want you to imagine two kinds of people.

The first person believes in God, reads the Bible, prays, and attends worship services. But he practices his faith only for his own benefit. He reads the Bible to learn,

and he prays for his own needs. And when other believers ask him to pray with them, he says he is busy. When he sees believers who are discouraged, he doesn't know what to say to them. When he sees unbelieving people who need the love of Jesus, he does nothing. When he has difficulties in his life, he tells no one. When he is tempted, he leans on his own strength, rather than asking others to pray for him. This believer becomes more and more tired, lonely and self-absorbed.

Now imagine another believer. She too prays, reads her Bible and attends worship services. But she involves herself in the cares and concerns of others. She dedicates time to tell at least one unbeliever about how Jesus can help them. When they have needs, she tries to meet them. And she spends time praying and planning with other believers who do this. She surrounds herself with people who can support her when she is tempted by evil and when she is troubled by hardship. She prays for others and has others praying for her. She is part of a team, a family, a group of people who are dedicated to proclaiming the good news of Jesus. When she reads her Bible, she asks God to use it to strengthen her and challenge her for her work of saving others from the power of sin and the devil. She finds new energy each day from God's love and the love of her fellow believers.

You have imagined these two believers. Who do you think is going to be more effective at making a difference in others' lives? Who will be more victorious in the battle against Satan's clever schemes to make us weak, ineffective and sinful? Who would you rather become?

God is gracious. His armor is strong. He puts us in a loving family. My prayer is that knowing this will encourage you to join God and his people to win against Satan's secret and deceptive plans. I pray that by God's power you will find victory!

The Armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20 and its Sources in Isaiah:

Ephesians	Isaiah
The belt of truth (Eph. 6:14)	“Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” (Isaiah 11:5)
The breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14)	“He put on righteousness as his breastplate....” (Isaiah 59:17)
The footwear of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (15)	“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace....” (Isaiah 52:7)
The shield of faith (Eph. 6:16)	There is no direct reference to a shield for believers in Isaiah. However, in many Old Testament verses, God himself acts as a shield for believers. Here is one example: “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” (Proverbs 30:5)
The helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:17)	“He put on ...the helmet of salvation on his head.” (Isaiah 59:17)
The Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God (Eph. 6:17)	“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword....” (Isaiah 49:2)

- In Isaiah, God and his Servant (Jesus) put on the armor and wear it. In Ephesians, God gives his armor to believers for them to wear.
- All quotes taken from the NIV translation (the New International Version).

Explanatory Notes:**WHEN PERSECUTION COMES**

Theme: The devil will cause suffering for believers, but they can resist him and remain steady because God will keep them strong.

Bible Verses: 1 Peter 5:8-11, NIV

Introduction:

Are you afraid to believe in Jesus Christ because you are sure you will suffer for your decision? Your fears are not unusual. Throughout the world Christians are suffering today. The devil is against freedom of religion! He stirs up trouble by convincing people that they should make trouble for believers in Jesus who turn away from traditional religious beliefs and practices. The devil can turn nice people into “roaring lions” when he does this. Here are two true stories from Mexico that show what I mean.

A new Christian was walking on the path to another village to tell the people about the love of Jesus. This is his story:

“As I was walking along I saw a man hiding himself behind a tree. He had a gun. He was looking at me. He fired the gun. The bullet passed me but did not hit me. I spoke to the man: ‘What are you shooting at? Why do you want to shoot me?’ He replied, ‘I am shooting birds.’ I told him, ‘It’s not birds you are shooting at. You want to shoot me! I want to tell you that you should not do evil. If you had shot me you would not gain anything. If you do evil, you will go to the place where you will pay for your sin. I came to your village to tell all the men that they should not do evil, killing and stealing. I came to tell you about the living God.’ That man went with me into the village. He invited me to his house and I stayed there that night.”

Here is another story from the same tribal group of people:

The topic of persecution and suffering is an important one in the Bible. For your background study I have selected the following verses, listed in the outline below.

This outline of Bible verses is very extensive. I was deeply impressed by the frequency of suffering in the Bible. I was equally impressed by the effects suffering has on our lives and the lives of others. We need messages on suffering.

This is not a topic people enjoy! It is ignored today by many believers who wrongly believe that God’s job is to save us from every trouble!

God told us to expect trouble as we struggle to witness and be holy. We must carry our crosses as Christ did in this sinful world that opposes God and believers.

But God has also promised to be with us every moment. Pain is not without meaning. When believers suffer patiently and faithfully for God, their faith is a testimony that affects people around them. In this way God uses their suffering and faithfulness to attract unbelievers to Jesus and extend his kingdom.

We encourage you to schedule a block of time to study these and the many

“When an older man in a village came to know the Lord Jesus, his son became furious. He first tried to kill his father with a machete. But when he failed, he cut all the ropes and bark that held his father’s grass- roof house together. It fell to the ground! A few days later a group of 30 believers hiked down to that village to encourage that old man, a new believer. About 40 men of the village gathered and asked many questions about religion and God. Getting angry at the answers they got, they seized Gustavo, one of the visitors. They beat him up, kicking him in the back and the head. Gustavo said to them, ‘Thank you, thank you for beating me up. The Bible says I am blessed by Jesus for this.’”

Now I would like to read what the Apostle Peter wrote about how Christians will suffer and what they can do about it.

“Control yourselves. Be on your guard. Your enemy the devil is like a roaring lion. He prowls around looking for someone to chew up and swallow. Stand up to him. Stand firm in what you believe. All over the world you know that your brothers and sisters are going through the same kind of suffering.

God always gives you all the grace you need. So you will only have to suffer for a little while. Then God himself will build you up again. He will make you strong and steady. And he has chosen you to share in his eternal glory because you belong to Christ.

Give him the power for ever and ever. Amen”

1 Peter 5:8-11, NIV

Peter tells us that the Devil will attack believers and make them suffer. But he also shows believers what to do when suffering comes to them.

A. The Devil attacks believers and makes them suffer.

Who is this “devil”? Peter gives us a good description:

other verses listed in the concordance of the NIV Study Bible.

1. Stories of how believers endured opposition and suffering:

- A. The people of Israel in Egypt: Exodus 1:8-22; 3:1-21
- B. Daniel in the lion’s den- Daniel 6:1-28
- C. Jesus’ prediction of his suffering: Mark 10:32-34
- D. Jesus’ suffering and death: Mark 15:21-37
- E. Stephen’s death (martyrdom): Acts 6:8-7:60
- F. Read Acts – example: Peter in 12:1-25

2. Predictions that believers will suffer opposition:

- A. Their troubles will purify them. Daniel 11:33-35
- B. Believers must carry crosses. Matt. 10:1-42, especially v. 38; 16:24
- C. Jesus’ followers will be hated. John 15:18-16:11
- D. Trouble will come but they will overcome it. John 16:31-33
- E. Everyone who wants to be godly will suffer. 2 Timothy 3:12
- F. Believers will be arrested unjustly: Mark 13:9-13

- **He is the enemy of believers.** He hates them and will do anything to harm them.
- **He is like a roaring lion.** Lions roam around in the darkness trying to find their prey. They are strong beasts, eager to kill and eat other animals. They sneak up on them in order to strike, kill and eat them! They destroy life! The devil does not warn us. He tries to sneak up on us, catch us and do us great harm. We must watch for his attacks.

We wish God would remove all suffering from us! Africans wish that lions wouldn't kill their cattle and people. The Bible teaches that believers enter into God's presence when they die. They no longer suffer. But a perfect time is coming when there will be *no* suffering. That time will come at the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of this age.

B. Believers suffer all over the world.

You may feel you are alone in your suffering. But you are not the only person who is or will suffer for Jesus. Believers are suffering all over the world. It is reported that some 160,000 believers died because of their faith in Jesus in the year 1996! That is shocking. The good news is that millions of people are becoming believers every year as seed of the testimonies of martyrs bears fruit. The Devil cannot stop the spread of the Christian faith!

C. God is at work in our suffering.

When we suffer, we are tempted to think that God is not in control. But look at how much Peter tells us about God:

- **God gives us the grace** we need to withstand pain, suffering and persecution.
- **God gives us the strength** to resist the devil. Notice what the Bible says. It doesn't say to run away from the devil. It doesn't say to be afraid of the devil. God tells us to resist the devil! We have the power to fight and defeat the devil! We defeat the devil by resisting temptation and by remaining faithful to God under severe persecution. When we do these things, the devil loses the battle. Who gives

G. Believers enter God's Kingdom through many hardships: Acts 14:21-23

3. Instruction to believers who suffer unfairly:

A. We must follow the "golden rule": Treat others as you want to be treated." Luke 6: 27-36

B. We must act as sheep, not wolves. Lk.10:3-12

C. We should follow Paul and accept suffering for Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:7-10

D. We should follow believers who are good examples of sufferers:

1. Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)
2. Moses – Hebrews 11:24-27
3. Christians in Thessalonika: 2 Thess. 1:3-7

E. We must be tested and purified as gold in the fire. 1 Peter 1:3-9; Revelation 7:14

F. We must be firm in our faith because this is normal for us as true believers, Philippians 1:27-30; Hebrews 12:2-3

4. Promises to sufferers:

A. God answers prayer and takes our fears away. Psalm 118:5-7

B. All over the world believers are suffering so they will share in his glory. 1 Peter 5:6-11.

us the strength to defeat such a powerful enemy?
The power comes from God.

- **God will only let us suffer a short while.** He will not test us beyond our ability. He knows how much we can withstand, and he will be merciful to us.
- **God builds us up again and makes us strong.** He makes individual believers strong again. He restores and heals us. He also makes groups of believers (churches) strong again. He uses persecution to help his people focus on doing good. They do not have time to play when they are on a spiritual battlefield! God also uses believers' suffering to lead other people to believe. People see how believers have strength and courage to face suffering. This attracts them. They want to have the same strength and courage. So God uses our suffering to enlarge the number of people who believe in him.

God doesn't tell us to suffer alone. He comes close to us and comforts and strengthens us. He uses our pain for our own benefit, for the benefit of his people, and for the salvation of unbelievers. But there is one more thing Peter tells us. And it is the most wonderful thing of all!

D. Suffering for Jesus leads to eternal glory.

Peter teaches us that believers have been chosen by God to share in his "eternal glory." When we suffer for our faith we take our place with Jesus. When we suffer for believing or for doing good, it is as if we are taking up a cross, as Jesus did. But after suffering on the cross, Jesus was raised from the dead and was given a name that is above every name (Philippians 2:5-11). In the same way, God will give us great glory after our suffering. As the Bible says, "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Are you afraid to suffer? That is normal! We all wish we could avoid suffering. We all wish we could have the glory without the cross. But that is not God's way. The Bible says that believers should expect to suffer, just as Jesus did. But our suffering is temporary. It will

C. Never stop praying until deliverance comes. Acts 12:5.

D. People will betray you, but you will be saved if you are faithful. Luke 21:14-19

E. The Holy Spirit will give us words to say to our persecutors. Matthew 10:18-20.

A true story about persecution today: (Note: names and places have been changed to protect innocent believers)

Leon was a religious leader (a monk in a non-Christian religion) in his country. He read about Jesus and decided to follow him. Then he studied in a Bible school. After that he moved back to his home community and started a house church for his people.

One day in 1988 he and his wife Nila came home from visiting in the homes of believers. Suddenly men with guns broke into their very simple home. They stabbed Leon with knives and shot him. He died. His death seemed unfair and a great loss.

Nila stayed in the village with their 11-year-old son even though people told her they should leave. Nila continued the ministry. It grew, and a church building was eventually built to accommodate the increasing number of believers. Eleven years later people exploded three bombs on the property of

end. After we suffer we will be given a glory and blessedness that will never end.

Conclusion:

What great courage Peter's words give us!

- They remind us to be alert and prepared for the sneaky attacks of Satan.
- They remind us that we are not alone. Others suffer as we do. This gives us strength to stand firm.
- They encourage us that God is in control and that good will result from the evil we experience.
- They promise us victory, grace and mercy as we face the temptations and opposition of Satan.
- They promise us a never-ending glory that will make us forget about the brief time of suffering and persecution we face in this life.

Friend, we live in a world where we must make choices. You may feel now that believing in Jesus will be dangerous for you. You may suffer, but you will never be sorry for your decision to follow Jesus. Jesus will reward you for whatever you lose for his sake. He will use your suffering to bless and save other people. And he will be with you always.

And, Christian friend, if you are facing hard times and are discouraged. Be alert! Fight the good fight of faith in Jesus. And remember, God is with you. He will give you the strength you need.

the church. The damage was great, but Christians from across their country sent gifts to help rebuild the church building. Nila and her people did not go to the police but endured the persecution patiently and silently. After that the opposition stopped. Today there are 1,200 believers in that church! They have started seven new congregations of believers in other villages. Persecution forces a testimony. It can enlarge the ministry even while it suffers. Jesus can be revealed in the way believers suffer.

Friends, this is what can and does happen. Leon lost his life, but his death was like a seed of undying faith. God helped Nila and their son to go on living, witnessing, loving and serving the people of their community. This is not what we would ever choose, such a sudden and unjust death. But God accomplished his purposes. And Leon received his reward in heaven on God's schedule which we often neglect to remember and celebrate.

The Dinka people of the southern Sudan have suffered greatly for many years because of civil war and attacks of military, anti-Christian and guerilla groups. Many of the Dinkas were believers in Jesus when this trouble started. They were shocked when government soldiers and guerilla groups burned their wood and thatch-roofed homes, killed men and boys especially. They stole and slaughtered their cattle, which is their main source of food and income. Thousands were hurt very badly. Whole villages were destroyed. Thousands of children ran away as refugees. Many were taken as slaves.

How did Christian Dinkas respond? They wrote hundreds of songs to express their grief, sorrow and fear. But their songs also show their great faith. On the following page are two excerpts from their hymns translated into English:

COVER US

It is we, O God, it is we, look back upon us,
and bless our days, bless this place,
this land we are in, so that it may be a holy land,
which you chose for us where we worship,
where we work, where your people are taught.
Open the light upon us, here, here.

Chorus: Cover us with your wings like a bird covers her chicks;
embrace us intimately, O God, hold us intimately in these bad years,
so that we may have life through faith in You.

O God...

Embrace us intimately, O God, hold us close in these bad years so that we live in your faith, O God.

LET US RETURN

We ask God for our lives; We ask God for our land;
We ask God for our property.
You are the great Lord and we pray to you
You are the great Lord and we adore you
You are the great Lord and we ask you
We pray to you for our land.

Chorus:

Father, Father, have mercy upon our land.
Return us to our land; return us to the land of Sudan;
Father, Father, have mercy upon our land.

Let us not increase sin by sinning
Do not let good depart from us;
our land is heavily burdened with sin.
We ask you, God, we ask you,
Great Lord, have mercy upon us.
We, your children, do not learn from our mistakes.

The tree cries to the Lord; grass cries to the Lord;
the animal cries to God; the bird cries to the Lord,
and the fish and the insects are confused because of disaster.
The land is crying, "Amayou, amayou ee!" [*A cry of desperation that means literally, "O my mother!"*]
Your mercy, O Father, turns us toward you, our great Lord.

And a person cries while holding his hand imploring:
Until when, until when, shall we worship you under the trees?
Until when, until when, shall we worship you in foreign lands?
Until when, until when, shall the buzzards live on our flesh?
Until when, until when, shall the animals live on our bones?

(From Dinka Christianity, Marc R. Nikkel. 2001)

Explanatory Notes:**OUR WORST ENEMY**

Theme: Believers must not let Satan defeat them by dividing them against each other.

Bible Verses: 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11, NLT; John 13:34-35, NLT

Introduction:

“United we stand, divided we fall.” This ancient phrase expresses a well-known truth.* If we quarrel with each other, our enemies will defeat us, because we do not unite to defend ourselves. In these messages we have talked about spiritual enemies such as the devil and evil spirits. But sometimes our own worst enemy is ourselves.

The devil knows this truth. He knows that the easiest way for him to defeat believers is to divide them against each other. He divides groups of believers (churches) against each other, and he also divides the believers within a church family against each other. He gets them to argue about their beliefs, divide over worship practices and compete with each other for power.

This is nothing new. The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to see believers fight with each other. On one occasion Paul had sharp disagreements with the church group in Corinth. He told them he would come to visit them, but their sin made him so angry that he decided not to visit them until much later. Here is what he wrote in a letter to them:

*Now I call upon God as my witness that I am telling the truth. The reason I didn't return to Corinth was to spare you from a severe rebuke. But that does not mean we want to tell you exactly how to put your faith into practice. **We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy as you stand firm in your faith.***

So I said to myself, “No, I won't do it. I won't make them unhappy with another painful visit.” For if I cause you pain and make you sad, who

*The phrase is from Aesop's fables of the 6th century B.C. Here is the original story:

A lion used to hunt in a field in which four oxen used to live. Many times he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they began quarreling among themselves, and each went off to a separate corner of the field. Then the lion attacked them one by one and soon ate all four. *Moral: United we stand, divided we fall.*

*is going to make me glad? That is why I wrote as I did in my last letter, so that when I do come, I will not be made sad by the very ones who ought to give me the greatest joy. Surely you know that my happiness depends on your happiness. How painful it was to write that letter! Heartbroken, I cried over it. I didn't want to hurt you, but **I wanted you to know how very much I love you.***

*I am not overstating it when I say that the man who caused all the trouble hurt your entire church more than he hurt me. He was punished enough when most of you were united in your judgment against him. **Now it is time to forgive him and comfort him.** Otherwise he may become so discouraged that he won't be able to recover. **Now show him that you still love him.***

*I wrote to you as I did to find out how far you would go in obeying me. When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive him (for whatever is to be forgiven), I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, **so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes.***

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11, NLT

Paul was angry with the Corinthian believers. But **his love for them was stronger than his anger.** He refused to allow his anger to turn him against them.

- He carried out his ministry with love for them and from a desire for their welfare.
- He avoided visiting them while he was angry so that he would not lose control of his anger in their presence.
- He forgave the believer who had previously caused much harm in the church group.
- He urged the other believers to forgive the man, too.
- **He knew that through Christian love, every believer can frustrate the devil's plans to divide God's people.**

Jesus said, "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."
(John 13:34-35, NLT)

Christian love is the most important of all virtues. Jesus and his apostles said that the command that we love each other is the most important of all of God's commandments.*

*Mark 12:28-31, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14.

But love requires determination and constant alertness. The devil is clever. He knows our weaknesses. He is also persistent. He will use every way he can to drive a barrier of hate and suspicion between followers of Jesus.

Sometimes the devil even uses our desire to defeat him in order to divide us against our fellow believers. There was once a devout religious leader who was obsessed with the devil. When his church members moved to a different house, he came to pray in each room so that evil spirits would not be able to bother them in their house. When the church didn't grow as fast as he wanted it to grow, he said, "The devil is keeping the church from growing." When other leaders disagreed with his ideas, he accused them of cooperating with Satan. He said, "The devil is attacking my ministry!" even though the leaders were not attacking him.

The team of leaders with whom he worked confronted him because he said harmful things against other believers. These leaders wanted him to change so that God would bless his ministry. But he refused to accept responsibility for the wrong he did. Instead, he again cried out, "Satan is attacking my ministry!" He treated their rebuke as demonic opposition.

Because he was unwilling to acknowledge his sin and turn from it, the other leaders removed him from power. He divided God's people, then left and formed another church. He continues to blame Satan and the other leaders. He refuses to see that what he did was wrong.

He blamed Satan for many things, but he was unwilling to see that Satan was acting through him!

Listeners, I have a great love for you. I pray that God will find you more honorable than that divisive, unteachable leader. I pray that you will recognize your own sins and shortcomings, and not blame the devil. And I pray that you will resist every attempt that the devil makes to divide you from your fellow believers. May peace and love reign supreme. And may you be blessed.

[Please conclude with an appropriate prayer, asking that God help believers live in unity and be aware of how quickly the devil can divide us and destroy our peace and harmony.]

Explanatory Notes:

PROUD LIKE THE DEVIL

Theme: Don't let your power over the devil lead you to become proud.

Bible Verses: 2 Peter 2:10-11, Jude 8-10 and others

Introduction:

In many recent messages we have seen that God has great power over Satan, demons and all unseen forces. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is protected by God's greater power. Every believer has power over the devil, because the Holy Spirit lives in them. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." (1 John 4:4). So the Bible encourages us to confront and resist Satan's attacks. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7).

But even this power we have to fight Satan with can be a great temptation. If we do not use our power rightly, it could make us like Satan himself! Are you curious to know what I mean? Think about this: The sin for which God will judge the devil is pride. Pride is the main sin of the devil. The Bible says this when it speaks of the qualities church leaders must have. Here is what it says:

[An overseer] must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

1 Timothy 3:6, NIV

The power God gives us to battle Satan can make us proud and conceited, just like the devil! Pride can make us think we are better than the devil. It can make us think we are more powerful than him. Isn't that a frightening thought? *The same pride that makes us think we are better than the devil, makes us more like him!*

Pride was a problem among the believers in Bible times. Some church leaders wandered from the truth. They became inflated with pride and insulted the devil. These are the words of the Lord's apostles about such false teachers:

They are reckless and proud and are not afraid of cursing the glorious beings in heaven. Although angels are more powerful than these evil beings, even the angels don't dare to accuse them to the Lord.

2 Peter 2:10-11, CEV

The people I am talking about are behaving just like those dreamers who destroyed their own bodies. They reject all authority and insult angels. Even Michael, the chief angel, didn't dare to insult the devil, when the two of them were

*arguing about the body of Moses. All Michael said was, "The Lord will punish you!"
But these people insult powers they don't know anything about.*

Jude 8-10, CEV

We may not understand all the details about the conversation between Michael and the devil. But the Bible's point is clear:

- The good angels of God are glorious beings, but they do not insult the evil angels (demons). They restrain their speech.
- We are not as glorious as angels are. We are sinful, imperfect people. So we should be even quicker to restrain our words than they are. We have no right to insult evil spirits.

But this happens among some believers. Some pastors talk to Satan during their worship service.* They insult the devil. They remind him that he is defeated. They mock him because he will one day be destroyed. They behave as if they are at a football game, jeering and shouting at the opposing team.

Certainly we should resist and oppose the devil by our faithful praying and preaching. But we must remember that God is the one who defeats the devil, not us or our bold speaking.

If we go to heaven and the devil goes to hell, is that because we are better than the devil? No, we go to heaven because God graciously rescued us. He saved us from our sins.

If we allow ourselves to be filled with pride, God will oppose us, just as he opposes the devil. Listen to this promise the Bible repeats several times:

*God sets himself against the proud,
but he shows favor to the humble.*

1 Peter 5:5, CEV*

*I have seen this happen on several occasions.

None of us likes to have enemies. Enemies make our lives unsafe. Their opposition frustrates our plans and our work. If this is what human enemies are like, imagine what it would be like to have God as your enemy! If you are proud and conceited, you will find out what that is like! The Bible says that God is the enemy of proud people.

We should not think we are better than anyone, even the devil. We should not insult or mock the devil. The time some people spend mocking Satan would be better spent praying to the Lord. He is the One with whom we should speak. He is the One we trust and depend on. We should not let our power over evil spirits fill us with pride. It is by God's power, not our own power or goodness, that we are able to resist and defeat the devil.

We see that **the fight against evil, unseen forces involves a delicate balance between two extremes.**

- **We should be confident in God.** We should not be fearful, but faithful. When we face the armies of darkness, we can confidently resist and defeat them by trusting in God's power and his love for us.
- **We should also be humble.** We should not think of ourselves too highly. Our confidence in God should not lead us to conceit, boasting or mocking. Our confidence should be in God, not in ourselves.

[Conclude with a humble prayer of dependence on God]

*1 Peter 5:5 is a quotation of Proverbs 3:34. James 4:6 also quotes this proverb, and Jesus puts it in his own words in Luke 18:14.