# 6+1

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

Will Fitzgerald

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Ephesians 6:10-20

Every year they hold something called the USA Memory Championship. In 2015, the “mental athletes” are first given a list of 200 words to memorize – in order. Later, they are given two decks of cards, which have been shuffled. and they have to recall the cards in order. The champion, Nelson Dellis, was able to recall all 104 cards. The runners up were eliminated 40 cards shy of that.

How do you do something like that? Lots of practice, of course. Sometimes people use a technique called “the memory palace.” This technique goes back to the ancient Romans and Greeks. The basic idea is that you imagine walking through a building, for example, and, at special points, you visualize one of the things you want to remember. I walk in my front door, and I see the Queen of Spades waiting to take my coat. I turn to the left and enter to see the Nine of Diamonds sitting in the rocking chair, talking to the Three of Clubs in the big cushy chair. And so on. With a strong enough mental image, and sufficient practice, you can learn to memorize long lists of things.

It strikes me that Paul presents us with a little memory palace here in Ephesians 6:10-20. Except that instead of a memory palace, Paul gives us memory armor. Usually, when preachers speak on this passage, they remind us that Paul’s image is of a soldier on the offense, ready to take on the devil. And this is not at all a bad reminder. After all, Paul says, our enemies are strong: the devil, the evil systems that seem to control so much, both named and unnamed. And Paul wants us to have the weapons we need for this battle.

But as I say, this is also a little image that can help us consider exactly what our weaponry consists of, and what we should do in the face of systemic and diabolical evil. These are the stances we are to take when confronted with problems, anxieties, social evils, our own sinful selves. These are the disciplines of truth, of righteousness, of peace, of faith, of salvation, of the word of God, of prayer. These are the things we can and must practice to be better Christians.

I bet, without much effort, we can all remember all the pieces of the armor of God that Paul mentions. Today. So let’s get started.

First, let’s count the pieces of armor, one by one. I see six, plus one special one at the end.

1. The belt of truth
2. The breastplate of righteousness
3. The shoes of the gospel of peace
4. The shield of faith
5. The helmet of salvation
6. The sword of the Spirit, the word of God
7. And the plus one: Pray in the Spirit, at all times

So, there are six plus one.

Now, let’s visualize and imagine we are putting on the armor. We start out in our regular clothes, and we are adding on to what we are already wearing.

1. First, we take this big belt and put it on. The King James says we “girt ourselves,” so that’s like a girdle, or Batman’s utility belt.
2. Second, we put on a breastplate, or something like a bullet-proof vest.
3. Third, we bend down, and put on our shoes.
4. Fourth, we pick up our shield.
5. Fifth, we put down the shield, and put on our helmet. Then we pick up the shield again.
6. Sixth, with our other arm, we pick up a sword.
7. And plus one, we remember to pray.

Now, let’s attach the practice or stance or discipline to each piece of armor.

One. We “fasten the belt of truth around our waists.” We are people who care about true things. Not just scientific facts (those too) but truths about the human condition, about God’s place in the world, about moral truth. We put on the belt of truth, and it supports us. It ties everything together. And because the truth is how the world is shaped, when we are girded with truth, we can make progress against the lies of our enemy, the Devil, and his evil systems.

Two, we put on a breastplate of righteousness. We not only care about what is true, but what is good. We ask ourselves, how can we call ourselves and others to a better way of living? When the Devil and his systems rack us with evil, we protect ourselves with good. And we remember that, in the end, our righteousness is not enough, but that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is sufficient for our every need.

Three, We put on for shoes whatever will make us ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. We have been given a precious message: God seeks to reconcile the world to himself, and to reconcile us to one another. “We are people of God’s peace.” And in every anxious moment and difficult interaction, one of our primary questions is this: How can peace prevail here, How can reconciliation occur, how can the people in this situation learn to know that God loves them, and that they are free to love one another? These are sure supports for our journey.

Four, we pick up our sheld of faith, which protects us from the fiery arrows of the evil one. We are confident that God will protect us, and we are loyal to God in the face of strong opposition. We show both trust and faithfulness. When bad times come, we try to discern what God is teaching us in this trial, and how we can more fully put our confidence in him, and how we can show deeper loyalty to God.

Five, we put on the helmet of salvation. Like faith, it gives us confidence that God’s project is to save us, to repair and heal our broken spirits and our broken world. When we seem beyond any fix or repair, when we see the world or the church beyond any fix or repair, we remember God considers us to have so much value that it is beyond our comprehension. The Devil isn’t going to get into our heads with his message of dispair.

Six, we pick up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Of course we mean by this the Scriptures, as the Spirit guides us and helps us to understand it. But also anything a discerning word is given, a word that helps us cut through confusion or gives us insight into the human condition. And remember that Jesus is especially revealed as the Word of God made flesh, and so his life and words become the primary word we speak.

And finally the plus one: we are called to pray and pray and pray, to be alert and pray some more.

In the news this week was the story of Capt. Kristen Griest and 1st Lt. Shaye Haver who had an historic first: they are the first women to graduate from the US Army’s Ranger School. This is an extremely difficult course to graduate from, physically grueling. Nineteen women started, only two finished. 381 men started, and only 94 finished.

You don’t have to be a war supporter to admire the physical courage and discipline their accomplishment represents. How much more, as Christians, are we called to put on spiritual armor? This will take courage and discipline, and I call on each us to engage in these disciplines:

1. Put on the belt of truth
2. Put on the breastplate of righteousness
3. Put on the shoes of the gospel of peace
4. Pick up the shield of faith
5. Put on the helmet of salvation
6. Pick up he sword of the Spirit, the word of God
7. And the plus one: Pray in the Spirit, at all times