



Battle
Putting on the Armor
Ready

**“The
Heart**

of

War”

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Little Theodore was a deeply-troubled child. As long as he could remember, he was haunted by a vague uneasiness that he never quite belonged. It would be years before he finally figured out why. By then, the rip in his psyche had become a homicidal rage.

His unwed teenage mother named him Theodore Robert Caldwell after his biological father. Later he dreamed of finding his *real* dad, but it never happened. It was the great disappointment of his life.

Theodore spent his first four months in an orphanage before his mother took him to Philadelphia to live with his grandparents. Ashamed of being an unwed mother, she told little Teddy that she was his big sister. Theodore would be in his mid-20s before he discovered that his big sister was actually his *mother*, and that Mom and Dad were really his *grandparents*. He would never forgive them for that deception.

When he was four years old his "big sister" took him from the only home he had ever known and moved him across the country to Tacoma, Washington. Theodore never recovered from the trauma of that move. Every time his mother looked at little Teddy, she felt guilty that she had brought him into the world as an illegitimate child. She found it impossible to touch him, or tell him that she loved him. To make matters worse, she married an alcoholic who abused Theodore. The little boy withdrew into a shell of bitter loneliness. Though he grew into a handsome young man, Teddy had few friends and even fewer dates. Throughout his life he would have a paranoid fear of intimacy.

At age 12, Theodore had found some soft-core pornographic magazines in a garbage can. It would become a lifelong addiction. Through the fantasy of pornography he could connect with women without the risk of intimacy. But the flesh never has enough flesh to satisfy the flesh. It always demands something more explicit and exciting. In the end, even the vilest pornography ceased to satisfy Theodore's lusts.

After the only girl he had ever loved broke up with him, he snapped. Somewhere in the outskirts of Seattle, he killed his first victim. Before he was finished, Theodore became the most prolific murderer in U.S. history. Some experts think that he may have killed as many as 160 women. The night before he was strapped into the electric chair, in an interview with Dr. James Dobson he confessed,

There was an unfulfilled longing in my heart. I thought that pornography could fill the emptiness. But it was never enough. I began to play around with the idea of acting out the violence that was part of my fantasies. I drank lots of alcohol to reduce my religious inhibitions. When I committed my first murder it seemed like I was possessed by something awful and alien."

Theodore "Ted" Bundy spent the last night of his life in prayer with the prison chaplain. He exhausted his final hours grieving over the horror and pain he had inflicted on countless victims. He wept for his own miserable and misspent life. In the early morning hours he finally smiled and said, "I will soon be set free from this body and be made new again."

The spiritual battle rages for all of us. Paul said in Ephesians 6:12,

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Ted Bundy said, "I felt like I was possessed by something awful and alien." Each of us is just as vulnerable if we don't protect our hearts and minds. St. Paul goes on in verse 13, "Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to stand your ground."

Do you remember what we learned last week? In ancient hand-to-hand combat there were four "kill" spots: the head, chest, belly, and legs. So the Roman army supplied its legionnaires with the best armor in the world to cover those vulnerable spots: a helmet to protect the brain; a breastplate to guard the heart and lungs; a thick leather girdle to cover the lower extremities; shin guards to shield the legs and hobnailed sandals to keep from falling down when the ground got bloody and slippery.

St. Paul says in verse 14 that we should be armed "...with the breastplate of righteousness in place..." Every part of the armor is critical. You can't leave your house (or even survive at home) with a single piece missing. The enemy of your soul will discover where you are naked and strike with devastating accuracy. Each week we are looking at a particular piece of the *whole* armor in this series on being battle ready. Today we look at the breastplate. Here's our seventh principle on spiritual warfare:

Guard your heart from the outside in and the inside out.

The Roman breastplate has one purpose: to protect heart and lungs. If those vital organs are stabbed, all hope is gone. The lungs breathe in the air, and the heart pumps that oxygen to the body, giving it the life to fight on. What the lungs take in, the heart gives out.

Little Teddy lived in a toxic world. From the earliest rejections of his unwed mother and repeated deceptions of his family to a lifelong obsession with increasingly-vile pornography, he breathed in the noxious fumes of his dysfunctional environment. His wounded heart pumped that poison to every molecule of his being, twisting and warping his soul. The "overflow" of that tortured heart brought horror and death to young women in a string of grisly serial killings.

None of us have done anything as monstrous as Ted Bundy, but we live in the same toxic world. Every day we breathe in poisons through the unguarded portals of our lives. Our heart takes those poisonous images and words and pumps them throughout our system, corrupting every part of us. And out of the overflow of our tortured and twisted hearts, we say and do things that corrupt and destroy others.

It is shocking, but nonetheless true: a "Ted Bundy" heart beats in all of us. It is susceptible to being pierced by others and screaming to get out and inflict some "payback" damage. That's why the wisest man who ever lived wrote in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." What comes from the "outside in" can kill you. What you spew from the "inside out" can kill others. That's why these truths about the "breastplate of righteousness" are critical to being battle ready:

1. Put on armor that provides two-way protection.

St. Paul calls this "...the breastplate of armor..." The Roman breastplate was *one-way* armor. It was usually made of thick leather and studded with metal orbs to protect a legionnaire's heart and lungs. But the breastplate of the Christian warrior is *two-way*: 1) guarding the heart from the assault of others, and 2) guarding others from the assault of our hearts. Let me show you how this breastplate works:

1) The *lungs*: breathing from the outside in

The Master Designer created us with a set of lungs. Oxygen is extracted from the air and infused into our bloodstream, to be distributed to organs and tissues. But the lungs not only breathe in air, when we exhale they dispose of the carbon dioxide that is the waste byproduct of our bodily process. In the course of a single day our lungs breathe in and out 8,000 to 9,000 liters of air. With their millions of tiny air sacs, our lungs are among the most sophisticated and complex of all the human organs. There are at least three dozen different kinds of cells, each with special tasks and abilities. Some are like vacuum hoses sucking in the air. Others are like exhaust pipes blowing out the toxins and wastes. Some are delicate, hair-like cilia, sweeping the mucous membrane clean. Still others stand as sentries to spot invading agents of infection. No man-made machine or computer has as many intricate working parts or is as complex as your lungs.

Good air is essential for healthy bodies. But our atmosphere is filled with pollutants, poisonous gases, toxic fumes, allergies, pollens, mold, second-hand tobacco smoke, and a thousand other pollutants. When we breathe in pollution, we can get sick or die. On the other hand, if we exhale pollutants from garlic breath to cigarette smoke to bacteria, we become a danger to

others. Even the words that travel on expelled air from your lungs can be verbal cyanide, destroying the souls of those within earshot.

Are you getting the picture? You need armor that provides two-way protection. There are deadly spiritual and emotional pollutants out there: the pornographic images of our media age, the seductive appeals of materialism, cruel words that kill our souls, negative statements that discourage our hearts, secular humanism spreading like a poisonous gas through our educational institutions, theological heresies being coughed out like killer bacteria from pulpits and abusive words spit out at impressionable children, leaving behind a lifetime of toxic residue.

The emotional pollution that little Teddy Bundy received from his parents was bad enough, but the poison of pornography finished him off. When he expelled the waste by-product of his corrupted inner self, it ignited a murderous plague across America. The poison that is breathed in to our souls is breathed back out with far deadlier consequences. Satan always has bigger fish to fry. Having corrupted you, he wants to widen the circle of corruption, by using you to destroy others. That's why King Solomon says to his teenage son, the crown prince of Israel, in Proverbs 4:20-27,

"My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; kept corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or left; keep your feet from evil."

As Solomon sets the moral compass for his son he says, "Above all else, guard your heart." What he breathes in will be pumped by his heart to his whole body and soul. We need to guard the gateways to our body. Verse 20 speaks about what we look at and listen to. Verses 25&26 talk about the places where we go and the kind of people we hang out with. Ted Bundy was addicted to pornography. So are 40% of American men who go to church every Sunday. More than ever, we must guard what we breathe in.

2) The *heart*: pumping from the inside out

We cannot repeat Proverbs 4:23 enough: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." King Solomon is saying that everything flows to and from the heart. Its placement is critical: halfway between your belly and your head. The mind is where we process our thoughts. The belly is the seat of our emotions. Standing between reason and emotion, the heart determines what we will do with those conflicting forces.

Our physical heart takes in the air from the lungs and pumps to every cell and organ of the body. It is amazingly powerful. The body of an adult contains over 60,000 miles of blood vessels. Strung together end-to-end, your blood vessels would encircle the earth 2½ times. Your heart pumps nearly 4,000 gallons of blood each day, and beats more than 30 million times a year to get oxygen to every cell and then take the carbon dioxide back out.

Just as the physical heart takes in oxygen (together with all its pollutants and toxins), distributes it through the body, and then pumps it back out, so our "soul" heart decides what to pump in from our moral environment. If the heart of our soul is pure and healthy, it will only pump good things into our life. If it is damaged and twisted, it will crave toxic things. No wonder Solomon's father, David, wrote in Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my *heart* that I might not sin against you." After he committed adultery and murder, he begged God in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a *pure* heart..."

When Solomon says to David's grandson, "Above all else, guard your heart..." he is saying in the Hebrew language, "Build a fortress around it." Paul says, "Put a breastplate over it." But the Christian breastplate is *two-way*. It not only protects our heart from that which comes from the "outside in," it also shields others from the "inside out" evil that our hearts might spew all over them. Jesus pulls no punches when he says in Mark 7:18 ff:

"Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean?...What comes *out of* a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts..."

Joseph Conrad wrote a classic book called *The Heart of Darkness*. It's the story of educated Englishmen from Cambridge and Oxford, the crème de la crème of proper Victorian society, who travel to the heart of darkest Africa at the end of the 19th Century. In that "dark" continent, surrounded by witchcraft, disease, cannibalism, primitive superstition and bloody tribal warfare, these proper Englishmen lose all sense of civility and sink into the most depraved kind of behavior. Conrad concludes that, if we strip away the social taboos and restraints of civilization, and we will all become savages. Within each of us is "the heart of darkness." Jesus says, "What comes *out of* a man is what makes him unclean." Ted Bundy breathed in moral toxicity. It was readily received by his "heart of darkness" and pumped throughout his system, turning him into a serial killer. Though we may not be as psychotic as Ted Bundy, we need shield between our hearts and others, lest the poisons in our soul are unleashed on them.

2. Put on the breastplate by putting on Christ.

If you will look carefully at each piece of the armor in St. Paul's manual on spiritual warfare, you will discover Christ. Christ is truth itself. He is our

righteousness. He is our salvation. He is the gospel of peace. He is the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit. He is the one who intercedes for us in prayer. To put on the *whole* armor is to first of all to clothe ourselves *wholly* with Christ. In Galatians 3:27 St. Paul says, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ." When we are born again the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ. From that moment on we are in Christ and he is in us. He covers us with himself. In Ephesians 4:24 St. Paul instructs us to "...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." The very decision to become a follower of Jesus requires that you clothe yourself with him. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness is to cover your self with the righteousness of Jesus. Until you have done that, your spiritual lungs and heart are vulnerable.

3. Put on the breastplate by committing yourself to righteousness.

What is righteousness? If you break down the word, it literally means "to be right." It means thinking right things, saying right things, doing right things, being in the right kind of places, and being the right sort of person. We live in a postmodern age when people are confused about absolutes. Morals are up for grabs, and no one has a "right" to define what's right or wrong for others. But this is why our Faith is radically counterculture:

1) We define righteousness from God's perspective. St. Paul says, in Romans 1:17, "In the gospel, a *righteousness* from God is revealed..." We don't have to guess what is right or wrong. God has revealed exactly who he is in Holy Scripture. He declares that he is righteous. If we want to be righteous, we have to be like him. He took on flesh and walked among us for 33 years on earth. If you want to know what it means to do what is "right" look at Christ. If you want to live a life that is right, then walk on this earth the way he did. God lays out the commandments for a righteous life in his commandments. Though we will never get it totally "right" this side of heaven, he does give us the power to live out those commandments and precepts through his Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote, "I can do *all* things through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

2) We live in the reality of *imputed* righteousness. St. Paul tells us in Romans 4:22 that God has *imputed* the righteousness of Christ to us. The word *imputed* is a Greek banking term. When it came to righteousness we were once bankrupt. We had no righteousness that could stand up to the scrutiny of a Holy God. But God took the infinite riches of Christ's righteousness and put it in your account. You are now the Bill Gates of righteousness. St. Paul puts it another way when he says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that you have been "clothed in the righteousness of Christ." Not only are you filled with Christ's righteousness, you are covered with it. He declares that you are righteous. He sees you as righteous. When you were saved, he strapped the "breastplate of righteousness" on you. Now go out and live a life that is worthy of who you really are in Christ! Everyday, when

you get up to fight the battles of life, declare to yourself and the enemies you face, "I am the righteousness of Christ! I refuse to live other-wise, by the grace of God!"

3) We commit to doing right. Skin and bone is soft. It can't protect the heart from a piercing weapon. So the Roman legionnaire puts a hard surface over his chest: thick leather studded with metal. As Christian warriors we must wear a steel resolve to do right. That's what Joseph did. You can read about his temptation in Genesis 39. Twice his Egyptian master's wife tried to seduce him. It would have been easy for a hot-blooded young man like Joseph to give in to her advances. But he said to her in verse nine, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" When she grabbed hold of him he ran away, leaving his coat in her hands. It cost him dearly. In the words of Victor Hugo, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." She accused him of attempted rape. He was railroaded by a kangaroo court and spent twelve years in prison for a crime he never committed. But, when he strapped on the "breastplate of righteousness" he committed himself to doing "right" no matter what it cost.

4) We remember that doing right is its own reward. Putting on the "breastplate of righteousness" means that I will do "right" even when it doesn't pay off. As far as I know, Joseph was never vindicated. Jesus proves that sometimes doing right even leads to death on a cross. It was the Puritan writer, John Bunyan who wrote, "Doing right is its own reward." This kind of righteousness is the most radical of all.

5. Above all else, get a heart transplant.

Whether it beats in the chest of Ted Bundy or within your ribcage, the human heart is a dangerous thing. Jeremiah 17:9 describes it this way: "For the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt. It is beyond cure." There is no way that we can fix our own hearts. Jeremiah says that the human heart is "beyond cure." All the psychologists in the world couldn't put Ted Bundy back together again. Nor can they fix you. Jeremiah says that our heart condition is "desperate." David understood that when he confessed his adultery, deceit and murder in Psalm 51. That's why he said in verse 10, "Create in my a *pure* heart." God has to more than fix our old heart. He has to give us a heart transplant; even the heart of Jesus himself. There's no waiting list for this heart. You can go to the head of the line and get it today. But you do have to confess that your old heart is as deceitful and corrupt as that of Ted Bundy. With sorrow, you must repent of all the ways your heart has deceived and corrupted others. Then you must ask for Christ to rip out your old heart and replace it with his. You must then commit to putting on his righteousness as your breastplate, and living a life that is committed to walk in righteousness as God defines it. Then, dying to "self" you can proclaim the triumphant words Ted Bundy uttered just before he died: "I shall soon be made new again."

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