

# the next step

## stepping out and following where He leads

Jesus' summons is simple - 'Follow Me!'

As His disciples, those who have responded to His call, the church is, by definition, a people on the move.

As Ruth said to Naomi, so His church says to Jesus, 'Where you go, I will go.' We are bold, therefore, both as individuals and as a local fellowship of believers, to step out in faith and to follow where He leads. 'The next step' is always the most important one and it's what that 'next step' looks like for ourselves that this series of studies addresses.



You can find the background to this short series here.

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## 16. Taking your stand

(Ephesians 6.10-20)

[w/b Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020]

*“.. be strong in the Lord ..”*

Having set out in the first half of his letter what is true about every believer, in the final three chapters Paul has been exhorting his readers simply to *be* what they *are*.

This passage continues the theme of the previous section. Over against the ‘dark world’ (Eph.6.12) in which they once lived, Paul has made plain that believers, as ‘children of light’ (Eph.5.8) are now characterized as **satisfied** (Eph.5.3-20) and **submissive** (Eph.5.21-6.9): here he expounds a third characteristic of those who are ‘light in the Lord’ – they are also **strong**.

(The Puritan William Gurnall [1617-79] has a book on these verses entitled, *The Christian in Complete Armour*; it remains to this day the classic practical exposition of this passage. It’s long, but very helpful – and available on Kindle at £0.99!)

*[This is one of those passages where all 7 questions are vital! If you can’t manage them all, then try starting with questions 1, 3 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]*

*There should be, as usual, a video introduction to this study, available under ‘Resources/Live streams and videos’ on the website.*

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**1. Read Eph.6.10-20.** There’s real benefit, of course, in working through these verses slowly and in some detail; but it’s helpful, as always, to start by getting an ‘overview’ of the passage.

When and in what ways did you first become aware of the reality of the spiritual warfare of which Paul speaks?

It's possible to be either overly pre-occupied with, or rashly forgetful of, the activity of the devil; do you think, as a church family, we have a balanced approach?

**2. Read Eph.6.10.** It's helpful to see that this final exhortation is a command: that means 'being strong' is both possible (even for those who feel weak) and necessary.

In what respects are you most conscious of your own weakness?

How in your weakness do you become 'strong in the Lord'? (This is important! To stimulate your thinking on this read **2 Chron.20.1-17; 1 Cor.2.1-5; and 2 Cor.1.8-11**)

**3. Read Eph.6.11-14a.** Paul's exhortation to 'be strong' is because he is clear that as a Christian you are to '*take your stand*': note how often that word 'stand' is used by Paul through these verses.

What do you learn about the 'enemy of souls' from these verses?

Paul speaks of times 'when the day of evil' (v.13): how have you experienced that?

**4. Read Eph.6.14-15.** Having spoken twice about 'the full armour of God' (vv.11 & 13), Paul now starts to explain in some detail what he means by this key aspect of our being 'strong in the Lord'.

What are the three pieces of 'armour' mentioned here?

How do you 'put on' (v.11) these bits of armour?

In what ways do these help you to 'stand firm'?

**5. Read Eph.6.16-17.** Back in Paul's day a shield, a helmet and a sword were all vital parts of the equipment any soldier needed to engage in the demands of the battlefield.

What does putting on each of these bits of armour entail?

In what ways have you discovered how vital these bits of 'armour' are in the spiritual battles you've faced?

**6. Read Eph.6.18.** Paul now moves from the *armour* of the soldier to the soldier's *activity* – the way in which the soldier, thus armoured, does battle against the powers of darkness.

What is Paul pointing to when he exhorts his readers to pray 'in the Spirit'?

The exhortation is addressed to the believers together: why is *corporate* prayer so potent in our contending against the powers of darkness?

**7. Read Eph.6.19-20.** It's striking, for a number of reasons, that the apostle rounds off this section on the 'full armour of God' with a more personal and specific request that they pray for him.

For what specifically does Paul ask that they pray, and how does this help inform your praying?

In what sense might we pray this specifically too for one another (read **Acts 4.23-31**)?