SPIRITUAL CONFLICT
SESSION ONE
KNOWING YOUR ENEMY

As a Christian, you will experience spiritual conflict. You may experience conflict with family and friends who will resist your Christian faith and try to convince you to turn away from Christ. You may experience conflict when you hear the message of another religion that teaches there is another way of salvation other than through faith in Jesus Christ. You may experience conflict when confronted by things in the world that tempt you to sin. Also, you may experience conflict within yourself at times when you doubt your own faith and commitment to follow Christ.

The ultimate source of all your spiritual conflict is Satan. Satan’s goal is to confuse you, to discourage you, and to try to convince you to give up your commitment to follow Christ. The way that Satan does this is to lie. In John 8:44, Jesus tells us about Satan: “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” In the Bible the expression father of means to be the source of something. So Jesus means that Satan is not only a liar, he is actually the source of lying and untruth. Satan’s plan is to either twist the truth or tell outright lies in order to get you to disobey Jesus and to serve Satan. He is using the same strategy to mislead you that he has used on human beings since the beginning of history.

Small Group Discussion
1. Read Genesis 3:1-7
2. What did Satan lie about to Eve?

In Genesis 3:1-7, Satan tempted Eve to sin by lying to her. Here, Satan lied to Eve in three ways. Satan also will attempt to lie to you in the same three ways. First, Satan misrepresents who he is. Satan came to Eve in the form of a serpent. At that time they were serpents most beautiful of all of the animals in form and appearance. In the same way, Satan will also come to you in a form that is appealing in order to distract your attention away from God and onto himself. 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14-15 warns,

I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ . . . . And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

You must be careful not to be fooled by Satan when he comes to you in a beautiful and impressive form. This may be speaking to you through a person that you respect or admire, or through a situation that seems wonderful. It is only afterward, when you have said, “Yes,” and started down this new road, that you will learn that what you thought to be a blessing is actually a curse that has come to you from Satan.

Second, Satan lies about who God is. In Genesis 3:4-5, Satan told Eve, “You will not
surely die, for God knows that when you eat of [the fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Satan was lying about God. He was telling Eve,

“Either God does not know what is best for you, or He is not telling you what is best for you. God is power hungry. He wants to keep you under His control and to prevent you from reaching your potential. God tells you that you are small, weak, and insignificant because He wants you to rely on Him. But the truth is that God is small and weak, and you should not let Him fool you. You can be your own God.”

Before you became a Christian, your life was based on this lie of Satan. You believed that you could control your own life. You believed that you could determine for yourself what is right and wrong, good and evil. But when you became a Christian, you turned away from this lie to God’s truth that is revealed through Jesus. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). The truth that Jesus has given to you freed you from Satan’s lies and all of their results—sin, evil, discouragement, and death. Now, in order to continue to experience this spiritual freedom you must continue to believe and follow the teachings of Jesus. You must continue to reject Satan’s lies.

Third, Satan lies about the results of disobeying God. Satan tells you that you do not need God. Satan wants to encourage you to substitute what is not true for what is true, and then to base your life on this lie as if it is the truth.

Satan’s favorite lie begins with the suggestion that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Every person can decide for himself what is true or false, right or wrong, good or evil. For example, Satan may tell you, “There is not one true God. You can you choose your own god.” Then Satan suggests, “There is no good or evil. You can decide what is good or evil for yourself.” Finally, Satan makes the bold claim, “There is no God to hold you accountable for right and wrong. If you blow it now you can always make it right the next time around.” This popular view denies the existence of God and endorses reincarnation. But the origin of this way of thinking is Satan. If he can get you to think you control your own destiny Satan has accomplished his goal. The result is not a life lived for you. It is a life lived for Satan, separated from God.

Small Group Discussion and Application
1. What are some lies that Satan uses to mislead people today?
2. What are some lies that Satan uses to mislead Christians today?
3. How can your small group help each other to overcome Satan’s lies?

Personal Application
1. Ask God to show you any area where you have accepted Satan’s lies rather than God’s truth?
2. Ask God to forgive your sin. Ask God to free you from the spiritual bondage that results from listening to Satan rather than God.
SESSION TWO
OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Small Group Discussion
1. What did God teach you through the personal application last week?
2. Read Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was tempted by Satan. Matthew 4:1-11 teaches us how Jesus confronted and overcame Satan’s temptation. By following the example of Jesus in this passage, you can also learn to overcome Satan when he tempts you. Matthew 4:1-11 teaches three principles for you to apply when you are tempted.

1. **God allows you to be tempted by Satan as means of spiritual growth.**
2. **Satan will tempt you at a point of weakness.**
3. **You can overcome Satan’s temptation by using the Word of God.**

Small Group Discussion
According to Matthew 4:1, who leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted?

Matthew 4:1-11 comes immediately after Matthew 3:13-17. As a result of Jesus’ act of obedience in baptism, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Father proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. And then Jesus was sent immediately by the Spirit into the desert in order to be tempted. Spiritual conflict is God’s will for His own Son, so you can assume that it is also His will for you.

The first principle is **God allows you to be tempted by Satan for your spiritual growth.** Many times in your Christian life you will experience a spiritual mountain top when you feel God’s presence and taste His glory. This will be followed immediately by a desert experience in which Satan tries to destroy you. When this happens you may be tempted to think that you must have done something wrong. You may think that you must have some evil in your life or Satan could not have come so close. However, when you enter the desert you are there because God has sent you there. God wants you to face Satan’s temptations for four reasons.

1. **God wants to show you His strength.** Although you cannot overcome Satan by yourself, you can do everything through the strength that God provides (Luke 1:37; Philippians 4:13).
2. **God wants to show you Satan’s weakness.** There is nothing that Satan can do to you that you cannot overcome with God’s help. As you experience God’s power and Satan’s weakness, you will develop boldness that will enable you to do even greater things for God. You will encourage other people to turn to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.
3. **God wants you to learn to trust Him.** When you face Satan’s temptation by yourself and fail, you realize that the next time you will need God’s help. So when the next temptation comes you will cry out to Jesus, “Please help me. I cannot overcome Satan alone.” You will say, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so
that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

4. **God wants to defeat Satan through you.** Each time you face temptation and overcome it, Satan’s authority over the present world becomes a little less, and God’s authority becomes a little stronger. Satan loses another battle and must retreat, although he may come again to fight another day.

The second principle is Satan will tempt you at a point of weakness. When He met Satan, Jesus had not eaten for forty days. His physical hunger was the weak point Satan chose to attack. Satan said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3). You also have weaknesses in your life that Satan will use to tempt you. If you are hungry, Satan may tempt you to steal food. If you are lonely, he may tempt you to enter a harmful relationship in order to get the emotional satisfaction you desire of need. If you are struggling with self-worth, Satan may tempt you to seek the approval of others rather than seeking God’s approval. If you are discouraged and lonely, Satan may tempt you into self-destructive behavior. In every case, Satan will try to convince you to depend upon yourself rather than to trust Jesus to provide for your needs.

Remember, God does not allow you to be tempted so that you will fail. God allows you to be tempted so that you will learn to overcome Satan with Jesus’ help. God allows you to be tempted so that your weak points will be exposed. You will learn through these experiences to trust Jesus. And Jesus will use these experiences to transform the weak points in your character into towers of strength.

Small Group Application and Discussion
1. Divide into groups of 2-3 people. Each person should share one weakness that is vulnerable to Satan’s temptation.
2. Pray for each other. Pray that God will strengthen each person so that they can withstand Satan’s temptations.
3. Jesus’ words that He says in response to Satan have the authority to overcome Satan. Why do Jesus’ words have this authority?

The third principle is you can overcome Satan’s temptations by using the Word of God. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus is tempted by Satan three times. Each time Jesus responds to Satan by quoting a verse from the Old Testament. As a result, each time Satan’s temptation fails. Jesus does not sin. Finally, Satan leaves Jesus alone, at least until another day when he will come to attack again.

Jesus’ words have authority to overcome Satan because Jesus is the Son of God. These words also have power because they are the words of the Bible. The truth of the Bible has the power to overcome the lies of Satan. The words of the Bible have power because they are true in Jesus’ own life. Jesus’ use of Bible verses when He is tempted is His declaration to Satan that: Jesus trusts God to meet His every need, that He has submitted to God’s authority, and that Jesus has made a commitment to worship and serve God alone.
You cannot overcome Satan by merely quoting Bible passages. You can only overcome Satan by seeking to live in obedience to the Bible, God’s Word. When you commit your life to serve Jesus, and then live out this commitment by trying to follow His teachings, Jesus will empower you to overcome the temptations of Satan.

**Personal Application**
1. Ask God to show you areas where you are repeatedly tempted. These are weak points in your life which you have not yet completely submitted to Christ’s authority.
2. Try to think of one Scripture that you can use to help you when you are tempted in each of these areas. Other members of your small group may help you with this.
3. Begin to memorize each of these passages of Scripture. Ask God to help you apply these verses to your life.
SESSION THREE
THE CHRISTIAN’S ARMOR, PART ONE

Small Group Discussion
1. What did God teach you through the personal application last week?
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-18

In your life as a Christian, Spiritual struggle is not an unusual occurrence. Rather, it is a part of your everyday Christian life. In Ephesians 6:12 the word translated “struggle” is a Greek word which means intense face-to-face, hand-to-hand fighting. The image is like that of two samurai fighting against one another with swords to the death. The description is of a daily struggle that you experience for the rest of your life. In this spiritual conflict there is no time to sit down for rest and relaxation. The moment you cease to fight, the enemy is there to take advantage of you.

The enemy in this spiritual struggle is described variously as “rulers, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil.” There are a variety of evil spirits. These evil spirits participate in Satan’s plan to undermine God’s will for your life.

Never attempt to face evil spirits alone, using only your own strength. If you do this the result will be certain defeat. This is because, like every other human being, you have a tendency to fall into temptation and sin. “Each one is tempted when by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has been conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15). In order to resist Satan, you must “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:1). In order to overcome Satan, you must trust in Jesus and rely on the strength that He provides. Just as relying on your own strength results in certain defeat, reliance on the strength that Jesus provides results in certain victory. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

When you are face-to-face with spiritual conflict, in order to stand strong in the Lord’s power, you must “put on the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11, 13). This armor is actually the spiritual protection that God has provided for us through Jesus Christ. When you are clothed in God’s armor, you can move forward in your struggle against Satan and his evil spirits.

Small Group Discussion
1. Share about a time in your life when you have experienced God’s protection.
2. What is each piece of the armor of God? What does each one symbolize?

Every piece of the armor of God in some way points to your position in relationship to Jesus. Ephesians 6:14-15 mention the first three pieces of equipment, the belt, the breastplate, and the shoes. According to these two verses, you should already have these on before attempting to stand firm against Satan. Just as the belt secures the armor and
holds it against the body, in the same way God’s truth binds you and enables you to stand firm when you face Satan. The most important aspect of this truth is the relationship that you have with God through Jesus Christ. The truth is that as a believer in Jesus you are already God’s child who has been forgiven of your sins and is destined for eternal life.

The breastplate is the righteousness of Christ. While any attempt that you make to be righteous on your own is only “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:4), the righteousness of Christ is a wall of armor that is able to protect you from Satan’s attack. In the battle against Satan, you may sometimes be wounded. But because of Christ’s righteousness which protects you, Satan is unable to inflict spiritual death by wounding your heart. What this means is that when Satan tempts you and causes you to sin, this sin will not result in your spiritual death. This is because God accepts the righteousness Christ for Christians as our own righteousness. This is God’s promise in Romans 3:22-24:

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Good shoes allow the soldier to continue to move forward in any condition, whether on a long march, over rough terrain in bad weather, or in battle. In the same way, your feet are to be fitted with the gospel of peace. It is the good news that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ which allows you to move forward with confidence through any situation in life.

Small Group Application
Putting on the shoes of the gospel enables Christian’s to go with confidence, confronting Satan’s power in places where his influence is strong.
1. What are some places where people are especially influenced Satan’s power at work? These may be places of great evil, places where people experience strong temptation, or places where false gods are worshipped.
2. Choose one or two of these places to go to as a small group for prayerwalking. This week praywalk at one or two of these locations. Pray for the power of Satan and evil to be broken at this location. The praywalk may be done individually but there will be more boldness if it can be done together as a small group. You can learn more about how to do this by studying the Toolbox unit on prayerwalking.

Personal Application
1. Have a personal prayer time. Begin by reading Ephesians 6:10-18. Thank God for providing this spiritual protection through His Son, Jesus. Ask God to protect you with each piece of the spiritual armor so that you can resist temptation and other spiritual attacks.
2. Participate in your small group’s prayerwalk this week.
SESSION FOUR
THE CHRISTIAN’S ARMOR, PART TWO

Small Group Discussion
1. What did God teach you through the personal application last week?
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-20

After the Roman soldier was fully clothed with his belt, breastplate and shoes, he picked up the equipment that he needed for battle, his shield, his helmet, and his sword. The Roman soldier’s shield was a rectangular piece of wood about the size of a door, covered with several layers of leather. Before battle the shield was soaked in water so that any flaming arrows shot by the enemy would be extinguished. Due to the shield’s size, the soldier could hide his whole body behind it so that there was no risk of being hit by enemy arrows.

The shield which protects you from the fiery arrows of Satan is faith in Jesus Christ. It is only as a result of your faith in Jesus that you can be protected from Satan’s temptations. It is when you stop trusting in Christ and begin to depend on yourself that you become open to Satan’s attack. You should never fool yourself into thinking that you are strong enough to face Satan alone. Any shield that you may attempt to make without Jesus’ assistance will get shot through with arrows, and you will suffer the consequences.

The helmet of salvation is also referred to in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 where we are told that we must put on the “hope of the helmet of salvation.” The helmet was an extremely important part of the soldier’s armor because it could prevent a blow to the head that would bring about almost certain death. In the same way, certainty of salvation is your defense against Satan’s most savage attacks. This certainty includes knowledge about what Jesus has done for you and confidence that what Jesus has done is enough. You have no fear or uncertainty because you are convinced that Jesus really has saved you from sin and death. Of course this kind of certainty of salvation is God’s gift, but it involves the head. It involves thinking about and understanding all that God has achieved for you through the gift of His Son, Jesus.

This helmet protects you when Satan comes whispering in the ears of your soul, trying to bring about discouragement, doubt, and fear. Satan may say such things as, “Do you believe that God really loves you? Why would God love you when you continue to disobey Him? Do you think He will just keep forgiving you for doing the same things over and over again? How do you know there is a God, and even if there is, why do you think He cares about you?” When Satan raises these doubts and fears, God has given you a response: “I know that God loves me, because He sent Jesus to die on the cross for my sins. ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:16).
Small Group Discussion
1. Are you experiencing discouragement, doubt or fear? Share about this with your small group.
2. Pray for God’s help for each person to overcome their discouragements, doubts and fears. Pray that your trust in Christ will grow stronger.

The final piece of equipment is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). The Greek term translated word here refers to a spoken word. The sword refers to when the Holy Spirit enables a person to talk about the Word of God. Romans 10:8 and 17 emphasize that when the Word is shared with other people it brings about faith which results in salvation. The Holy Spirit takes these words that you share and applies them to the heart of the hearer. The results are conviction of sin, acceptance of the truth, and faith that results in salvation.

Ephesians 6:18 emphasizes prayer: “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” It is through prayer that you can apply the armor of God to your own life. Just as spiritual conflict with Satan is a daily experience, application of God’s armor should also be a daily experience. Then you will be able to overcome Satan and serve Jesus completely.

Small Group Application
1. Share one thing Jesus has recently shown you about Himself that has strengthened your faith in Him. If possible, share a Bible verse that supports what you are sharing.
2. Thank God for the truth of His Word that provides the opportunity for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Who is one person that you would like to share the Good News about Jesus with?
4. Pray that each person whose name was shared will have the opportunity to hear the Good News about Jesus. Pray that they will be saved.

Personal Application
1. Ask God to give you boldness to share the Word of God with at least one person this week. This may be the person whose name you shared with your small group or someone else.
2. When God gives you the opportunity, share the Good News with one or more people. Begin by sharing your own testimony briefly (in two or three minutes). Tell about what your life was like before you became a Christian, how you came to believe in Jesus, and how your life has changed since you became a Christian. To learn more about how to share your story see the Basic Evangelism Toolbox unit.

Reflection
1. What have you learned about spiritual conflict?
2. What questions do you have about spiritual conflict?
3. What is your plan to share what you are learning about spiritual conflict with someone else?