

**Marie Halvorson**  
**May 7, 2010**

*Lord, we thank you for all the blessings you have given us. I pray, Lord, that you would send us the spirit of wisdom and revelation to do your will and walk in your ways. Amen*

It was a beautiful summer day back in 1994 at the Wells Swimming Pool. I cautiously placed my foot on the cool white plastic step, one foot after the other, I slowly climbed to the top; the steel railing was still warm from the sunshine. I stood before my enemy, the deep end. I clutched my lifejacket as I fearfully stood on the rough-surfaced blue diving board. I turned and glanced back, only to find a long line of impatient 7-years-olds waiting behind me. "Hurry up! I'm freezing!" yells a level-3 student. "Okay, Marie. You can do this, you can do this!"

Even though my feet tingled from this awful height, I found myself slowly inching towards the edge. When I finally reached my destination, I saw a familiar face; it was my teacher, smiling with open arms, ready to catch me. With my lifejacket tightly wrapped around me, straps secured, and my feet firmly planted on the board, I knew that I had done everything I could do to prepare for this final moment. I trusted that my teacher would catch me, so I inhaled all my nervousness, and...I jumped! The feeling was exhilarating as I jumped into the air and splashed into the refreshing water. I felt the secure arms of my instructor pull me to safety and I couldn't wait to jump again. With the support from my teacher and a little help with my lifejacket, I had overcome my enemy.

Well, here we are. The end of the year; students are lining up their summer jobs, we're all furiously typing final papers and finishing up projects, and instead of wearing a lifejacket, I'm a senior getting ready to don her cap and gown. It seems like only yesterday that my parents dropped me off in Solberg Hall for the first time and my roommate and I were instantly bonding over our mutual love for Justin Timberlake. Where did all those late nights of studying and Wal-Mart runs go? I feel incredibly blessed to have made so many great connections and relationships along the way; I can't imagine leaving it all behind.

The journey through college is done in a blink of an eye and the real world awaits us, and sometimes with not so wide of open arms. So how do we leave this comfort? How do we go on beyond the doors of Augustana College and leave this place we've called home for a few years? It's what we've come to know as our safeguard, our protector, something that we didn't have to think twice about when coming back in the fall.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians to "take up the whole armor of God so that you may stand firm." Just as all of us are going to be leaving Augustana at some point, whether it be because of graduation, going on sabbatical, or studying abroad, we must prepare ourselves to take a deep breath, jump off that diving board, and go out into the world protected by everything we've learned, loved, and come to know about God; for He is the one who has taught us to love and how to live. Can you imagine yourself going into a battlefield without anything to protect you?

Paul clearly understands that it is vital for believers to stand firm in their Christian faith; he knows that to give ourselves over to God is not going to be easy and therefore tells us to prepare ourselves. When Paul writes to his first-century readers, he is keeping in mind what the people would have seen every day to make that clear connection; and accordingly, he describes preparing oneself for the evils of this world as a Roman Soldier would prepare himself for battle. It is even more interesting to think that Paul was imprisoned during the time he was writing his letter to the Ephesians; a Roman guard clad in his armor would have been standing right next to him!

To defend ourselves from the evils of this world, not only means against man, but also from our own weaknesses and despair; our “invisible enemies.” When envisioning preparations for battle, the first thing Paul says is to fasten the belt of truth around your waist. The belt is there to provide support and prepare us for vigorous activity with the truth that has been revealed in the Gospel. This means we are to serve God with an open and pure heart and not to give ourselves over to hypocrisy.

Secondly, the breastplate of righteousness was a piece of armor to protect the soldier from any arrows or blows to the chest. To protect ourselves from attacks and despair, we are called to love our neighbors, to be honorable and virtuous, and commit ourselves to doing acts of righteousness. And when Paul tells us to wear our best “sneakers” to proclaim the gospel of peace, keep in mind again of his first-century readers. Most of them did not wear shoes at home, but only when facing their enemy at war. Therefore, the shoes to proclaim the Gospel, symbolizes great significance; he wants us to run, skip, and jump in those kicks!

Next, and most importantly, Paul writes, “With all these, take the shield of faith as it will quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” It’s important to remember that all of this armor is provided by God; it is not our own. Ephesians 2 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” If I were a soldier, I would want my shield of faith to be as big as possible! And to wear the helmet of salvation is to armor ourselves in the salvation which God has provided with his gift of Christ, to free us from the bonds of hell. Can you imagine yourself going into battle without your head being protected? If we are set out into the world relying on our own righteousness and our own salvation, then the rest of our armor is useless.

And finally, take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Notice that out of all that armor, the only weapon is the sword of the spirit; the word of God cannot fail you. For in seeking Him and His word, He shows us what is right and what is good. Paul’s prayer for believers is that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him even further through prayer and supplication. To gain this revelation, all we need to do is be hungry in spirit!

During an International House of Prayer conference in Kansas City, I had heard a song by Laura Hackett entitled, “I Put on Christ.” The lyrics of the song remind us of all the times the devil catches us napping, not just something we’ve learned to do really well in college, but he catches us when we are unaware of our actions and become most vulnerable due to laziness or surrounding ourselves with temptations.

Hackett sings, “The battle is raging, the devil is raging, and I don’t want to be sleeping when the battle is raging. For my spirit is willing, but my flesh gets tempted, rise up my soul and start praying because I don’t want to be defenseless.”

We don’t want to be defenseless. This is why it’s so important to remain alert and steadfast in the armor God has provided us; he will never leave us in the darkness. We have to trust that the Lord will move us and fling-wide those doors to show us where he wants us to go, fully protected in his armor. “It doesn’t have to be a blind battle because we have put on Christ; we have the mind of Christ.”

It’s comforting to know that the Lord is our steady rock who will train us for our battles and deliver us from evil. When you’re afraid, trust Him, cling to Him—He will guide you and protect you. From 2 Samuel 22 - “The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation, the God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above my adversaries, you delivered me from the violent. For this I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.” So as we leave our comfort, our friends or our home, whatever the fear, anxiety, or evil may be, take up the whole armor of God, keep alert, and clothe yourselves with the new self, created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The battle and the devil are raging. Do you have your lifejacket on?