

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
October 21, 2018

The Family Church:

Part 7 – The Champion of the Family Church

Ephesians 6:10-20

The message begins with a video of Beth sharing her struggles to remain faithful in spite of the pain of divorce.

The Message

Beth doesn't look like much of a champion, does she?

But then, in this picture, who is the champion? It isn't the huge man on the left but the weakling on the right. (1 Samuel 17 is one of the readings for the day.)



God uses the weak to be Champions of his Church. What a comfort that is for those who have the call to be a Champion of the Family Church.

But who has that call? Moms and dads are called to step into the battle like David did against Goliath. Grandpas and grandmas have that call. Uncles and aunts. If any of your friends have children, whether you are married or single, you too are called to be a Champion of the Family Church, encouraging and supporting these parents.

But even the children up in the balcony (the K-8 Christian Elementary School children sang from the balcony) are called to be Champions of the Family Church. You are called to do all you can so that your family keeps its focus on Jesus.

So as we look at a portion of Ephesians 6, we have the opportunity to understand our calling to be Champions of the Family Church.

1. Champions see the enemy.
2. Champions use the armor.
3. Champions seek the support of prayer.

It is not hard to see enemies of the Family Church. I recently went to a presentation by Pastor James Emory White on what he called Generation Z. I've also been introduced to a book by Jean M. Twenge called *iGen*. Our youngest generation is facing some incredible challenges!

Many of you are growing up in households torn apart by the pain of divorce. Classmates may espouse a lifestyle that one author called "sexually fluid" where homosexual relationships and marriages is simply accepted. Even your gender identity is not clear. On a recent college tour, the

guides not only introduced themselves by name but said, “My pronouns are he, him, his.” “My pronouns are she, her, hers.” For some of us, we might be asking, “What other choices are there?” How about “xe, xyr and xyrs”? If you don’t believe me, check it out on Wikipedia! Some of us may role our eyes, but this is the reality that our youth are growing up in.

Yes, Champions of the Family Church are called to look out into the world around us and see the challenges. The church of Paul’s day faced some similar challenges as they also lived in a non-Christian world. But by faith we can see more. We can see who is behind these challenges.

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.

Beth in the video said what pulled her family apart were satanic attacks. Satan may change the tools he uses, but ultimately what is threatening our children is not simply “the world out there” or even (holding up an iPhone) “the world in here.” It is Satan himself! We are in a spiritual battle with powerful evil angels!

Recognizing that fact prepares us for the pain that Beth experienced. We understand this will not be an easy fight, we can be prepared for the losses.

One of the blessings of reading God’s Word is to see the losses that others have experienced before us. We saw David’s great victory in our Old Testament Lesson (1 Samuel 17), but if you read on, you’ll see the horrible defeats that Satan brought on his family. We hear about the wonderful confession that Peter makes, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” but we also see the defeat just a few minutes later when Jesus has to say to him, “Get behind me, Satan, you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man” (Matthew 16). We hear about the gospel victories Paul could claim, but we also hear him express his sorrow in his last words in 2 Timothy 4 when he lists so many of his associates who have deserted him and he feels so all alone.

The losses we experience in our efforts to be champions of the family church need not destroy you. Instead they can spur us on to be **Champions of the Family Church who take up the armor of God.**

Let’s read Paul’s description of this armor in Ephesians 6:10-17.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Read again verse sixteen. “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

What a wonderful reminder for us and for our children. The shield of faith can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

The evil one says you are a loser... as a parent or as a teen. The shield of faith says you are a child of God Most High perfectly forgiven because of what Jesus has done for you.

The evil one says that you are all alone. The shield of faith says you are never alone. Our ascended Lord says to each one of us, “Lo, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20).

The evil one says that you will never succeed. The shield of faith says that “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

If you, as a Champion of the Family Church, recognize that the devil is behind the challenges that your family faces, let’s put on the armor of God. Let’s bring this armor of God to our children.

Parents, do you understand how important you are in this role? If you go to church once per month because you are so busy, you are telling your children that you believe there are more important things than God. If you don’t believe your use of God’s Word is the most important thing, almost certainly your children won’t either. If going to church is an option for your family, don’t be surprised that your children learn from you and begin to opt out.

Make the commitment right now... there is nothing that will keep me and my family from worship. I will be here Saturday night or Sunday morning or Wednesday evening, or if nothing else, we will worship together as a family online. That’s what it means to carry the armor of God to your children!

Parents, why are your children in our Christian school? Yes, we want our kids to have a great learning experience at school, but most of all we want them to know that Jesus is at the center of their lives. When you are paying tuition, it isn’t a fee for a service. It is part of your choice to support gospel ministry for your kids and others. Every tuition payment is part of your effort to bring the armor of God to your children who are under attack.

Parents who have chosen to have your children in our public schools to be the salt and light that our public schools need, how are you carrying God’s armor to your children? May I suggest that you make a commitment right now that your worship on the weekend will always be a two-hour commitment... that you want your children next to you in worship so they see you putting on the armor of God. And that you enroll your children in Kids Club and Boost and Confirmation class and take that as seriously as your commitment to get them to school every day.

All of us... let’s recognize that our offering support of gospel ministry is all about rushing the armor of God to our children and to our community so that when the day of evil comes, they will be able to stand their ground. Your offerings are making St. Paul’s an armory that arms ourselves, the next generation, and our community in the full armor of God’s Word.

But our message series is about the Family Church... in our families we will either daily put on God's armor and teach our children to put on God's armor... or we won't. So how can we make every family... every Family Church... an armory that prepares us and our children for the demonic attacks of the day?

It is that daily use of God's Word. You might think. "I don't know where to start!" I so appreciate the comment that one of my Ministry Grow Team members made. "Rock the Gospels!" It isn't that hard. Just open up to a gospel and start reading a little section each day. I suggest Mark as a place to start because it is short and fast moving. Just read a section every day. Share a thought that strikes you. Ask if anyone has questions, and then close with the Lord's Prayer.

Is that too hard for any of us? I pray not!

Which leads to the final point that Paul makes in this section... the importance of prayer.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Paul was certainly a Champion of the Church, yet he pleaded for the prayers of God's people.

That is something that each of us can do as well. We can join in prayer, especially for the Champions of the Family Church who are on the front lines.

Dads and moms, I invite you to rededicate yourselves to the promises you made before God at your children's baptisms. Moms and dads with children in the home, please stand.

Let's join together in confessing the faith you promised to teach your children.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Now I invite you to make again the promise you made to God at your child's baptism. Let this be our Family Church Commitment:

Do you sincerely intend to bring up your children in the way of the Lord and to instruct them in the truths of God's saving Word so that they may grow in faith, serve God with a Christian life, and remain in their baptismal grace unto the end? If so, then answer: Yes, and we ask God to help us.

(Speaking to the rest of the congregation) The children of these parents are also our children and we have willingly assumed spiritual responsibility for them. I now ask all of us who are present that same question regarding the children in our church family.

Do you sincerely intend to bring up your children in the way of the Lord and to instruct them in the truths of God's saving Word so that they may grow in faith, serve God with a Christian life, and remain in their baptismal grace unto the end? If so, then answer: Yes, and we ask God to help us.

Now let's pray for these parents and assure them that we are joining with them in this spiritual battle for their children.

Children up in the balcony. Could you put your hands on each others' shoulders to be one united body in praying for your parents?

Everyone on the main floor, could you stand and put your hands on the shoulders of the parents who have been standing so they know they are not alone. If you can't reach a parent, then put your hand on the shoulder of someone who is praying for them so that parents are surrounded by a cluster of brothers and sisters who are praying for them.

Now, let's pray:

Father, you have entrusted the most precious gift imaginable into the hands of these parents, children whom they love and whom you love. You know Satan is seeking to destroy both their homes and the lives of their children. But you are greater than Satan. You are stronger. So we entrust them into your powerful hands. Help them be the spiritual leaders of their families that you have called them to be. Help them be daily readers of your Word. Help them bring their children weekly here to worship. Help them use the support of our school and congregation. Let them know that we as their brothers and sisters willingly join them in supporting our ministries to their children. They are not alone. In Christ they shall be victorious. Preserve them and their children in the faith. If some have wandered from the faith, Father, send the Holy Spirit into their hearts and bring them back. All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

My Next Steps as Pastor of a Family Church

- **See:** Look for opportunities to understand the demonic attacks on our youth. You might want to read *iGen* by Jean M. Twenge or *Meet Generation Z* by James Emory White.
- **Armor:** Begin a daily Bible reading or listening pattern today so that you might be healed of your spiritual wounds and bring healing to our children. Check out YouVersion or BibleGateWay apps for reading plans.
- **Pray:** “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). Pray for the children in your life. Ask others to join you in prayer for your children.

GroupWork

1. Share personal highs and lows from this past week and begin with the Lord’s Prayer.

The champion of the Family Church sees the enemies.

2. Read Ephesians 6:10-12. Is it helpful to you or frightening to see who the real enemies are behind the challenges our youth face?
3. What are the challenges that you see our youth facing that you didn’t face at that age? What can we do as a parent and/or adult to help youth today to overcome these challenges?
4. Read 2 Peter 2:1-10. What examples does the Holy Spirit give us to reassure us that in spite of the apparent victory of evil, God is able to rescue his people? How does that comfort you as you pray for your family?

The champion of the Family Church takes up God’s armor.

5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:17. Easter is the one historical event upon which ours and our children’s faith depends. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. What proof does Paul give that Easter is an historical fact?

The champion of the Family Church is supported by prayer.

6. How might each petition of the Lord’s Prayer apply as we pray for parents and as we pray children?
7. Share with the group the name of one child on your heart. After doing that, join together in praying the Lord’s Prayer with these children in mind.