BUILT FOR BATTLE • WEEK 1 OF 4

Rooted in truth

Read together: Ephesians 6:10–18; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; Acts 17:10–12

Distinguish faithful spiritual readiness from fear, speculation, and untested claims.

Plan a 75-minute weekly gathering: welcome and prayer (5), read and observe (15), teaching and discussion (25), group exercise (20), response and prayer (10). Bring a Bible and notebook. Members may pass on personal questions. Agree to respect privacy, with clear exceptions for safety or required safeguarding. This is original companion material, not an excerpt from the paid course.

Paul’s armor imagery in Ephesians begins with strength in the Lord, not confidence in personal intensity. The surrounding letter describes reconciliation in Christ, a shared life of holiness, and relationships transformed by love. Spiritual resistance therefore belongs within ordinary discipleship. The passage is not a license to identify disliked people as spiritual enemies. Paul explicitly distinguishes the struggle from a battle against flesh and blood. Human neighbors remain people to love, not targets to defeat.

The armor centers on truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, God’s word, and prayer. Each image should be understood within the gospel, not treated as a formula that guarantees an easy life. Standing firm can look like refusing dishonesty, repairing a relationship, praying through uncertainty, or resisting pressure to abandon Christ. Courage is not measured by how dramatic our language sounds. It is measured by faithfulness to the Lord whose strength we receive.

Second Timothy locates formation in the Scriptures that make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ and equip one for good work. Reading faithfully involves context: who is speaking, to whom, in what situation, and for what purpose? A memorable sentence should not be detached from the paragraph around it. The Bereans in Acts model receptive examination. They hear eagerly and examine what they hear against Scripture. Openness and discernment are companions rather than opposites.

For a small group, this creates a culture in which questions are welcome and claims are not immune to testing. No member should have to accept a personal impression simply because it is delivered with confidence. At the same time, the group should resist cynical dismissal of prayer or spiritual gifts. The goal is a people ready to hear, weigh, obey, and be corrected. We seek truth together under Scripture rather than compete for the strongest spiritual performance.

During this study, define “battle” carefully: resistance to deception, sin, despair, and the temptation to use power without love. This is an original four-week biblical companion, not a condensed transcript or substitute for the Built for Battle course. The group’s success will be seen in concrete obedience, stronger care for one another, and a more truthful way of making decisions—not in speculative claims about unseen causes.

WEEK 1 • GATHER & RESPOND

From study to practice

Observe the text

• Which repeated commands or images do you notice in Ephesians 6:10–18?

• What does the passage say about the source of strength and the identity of the struggle?

Discuss together

1. How does the gospel of peace challenge an aggressive or suspicious approach to other people?

2. Where have we confused confidence, emotion, or popularity with truth?

3. What does Acts 17 teach us about listening respectfully while testing what is heard?

4. Which piece of the armor corresponds to an ordinary decision you face this week?

Group exercise

In pairs, use the Discernment Checklist to assess this fictional claim: “A leader says God requires everyone to make a major financial commitment today, and asking questions shows unbelief.” Identify the biblical issues, missing facts, unsafe pressure, and an appropriate response. Discuss the claim rather than attacking a real person.

This week’s practice

Read Ephesians 6:10–18 on three different days. Record one specific act of obedience prompted by the passage. Before sharing a spiritual claim this week, distinguish the biblical text from your interpretation and from a personal impression.

Facilitator care

Keep discussion focused on the text. Do not invite members to diagnose another person as demonically influenced. If harmful pressure or abuse is disclosed, listen respectfully and arrange appropriate safeguarding or professional help; do not process details publicly.

Close in prayer

Ask God for truthfulness, courage, and a peaceable spirit. Pray by name for one person or responsibility without assigning speculative spiritual causes.

BUILT FOR BATTLE • WEEK 2 OF 4

Authority with a towel

Read together: Mark 10:35–45; John 13:1–17; 1 Peter 5:1–4

Practice leadership as service, accountability, and care rather than entitlement.

James and John seek places of honor, and the other disciples react with indignation. Jesus uses the conflict to distinguish his way from systems in which rulers dominate and great people display their power. Among his disciples, greatness takes the form of service. The foundation is Jesus himself, who comes not to be served but to serve and give his life. Servanthood is not an optional style for unusually gentle leaders. It belongs to the identity of leadership shaped by Christ.

John’s account of the footwashing makes this teaching visible. Jesus knows his authority and nevertheless attends to an ordinary bodily need. His humility is neither insecurity nor the avoidance of responsibility. He gives direction, names what is happening, and calls the disciples to follow his example. The lesson challenges both harsh control and passive leadership that refuses to address harm. Service uses authority for another person’s good rather than abandoning authority altogether.

First Peter addresses elders with the language of willing care, example, and freedom from greed or domination. The people are God’s flock, not a leader’s possession. This changes how a community handles disagreement, money, volunteer labor, and credit. The question is not merely whether a leader can get results. It is whether people can raise concerns, understand decisions, and experience care without being forced to protect the leader’s image.

Everyone in the group exercises some form of influence: in a family, a workplace, a ministry team, or a friendship. We do not need a title to create pressure or to serve generously. Small choices reveal our pattern. Do we interrupt? Do we make promises on someone else’s behalf? Do we notice who always cleans up? Can we apologize without explaining away the injury? Servant leadership begins close enough to be practiced today.

Healthy service also honors limits. A person can say no to an inappropriate demand and still be loving. Forgiveness does not remove the need for safety, accountability, or consequences. A community shaped by Jesus should never use submission or sacrifice to excuse abuse. The basin and towel belong beside clear safeguards and honest responsibility. The goal is not impressive humility on a stage, but trustworthy love in the life people actually share.

WEEK 2 • GATHER & RESPOND

From study to practice

Observe the text

• What contrast does Jesus make between domination and greatness in Mark 10?

• What reasons for service appear in John 13 and 1 Peter 5?

Discuss together

1. What forms of entitlement can appear without an official leadership title?

2. How can we distinguish loving correction from controlling behavior?

3. Where does our community need more transparency, shared credit, or practical care?

4. What makes receiving help or apologizing difficult for you?

Group exercise

Choose a fictional team problem: the same two volunteers always clean up while everyone else leaves. Draft a response that shares work fairly, listens to constraints, and avoids shaming. Identify who decides, who is consulted, and how the change will be reviewed.

This week’s practice

Complete one unseen act of service. Invite feedback from a safe, trusted person with the question, “What is one way I could make our shared work more respectful or fair?” Write down a specific change and follow through.

Facilitator care

Do not pressure members to confront an unsafe person or reconcile without safeguards. Let participants pass on personal questions. Model teachability by naming a modest, appropriate example of feedback you have received.

Close in prayer

Pray for humility, honest authority, fair treatment of volunteers, and courage to protect those who are vulnerable.

BUILT FOR BATTLE • WEEK 3 OF 4

A soul that can stay

Read together: John 15:1–11; Mark 6:30–32; Psalm 139:23–24

Build sustainable rhythms of communion, rest, and honest self-examination.

Jesus' image of the vine and branches connects fruitfulness to abiding. A branch receives life rather than produces it independently. The passage links this relationship with his words, obedience, love, prayer, and joy. Spiritual practices are therefore not ways of earning closeness to God. They help us attend to and live within the relationship Christ gives. A group studying leadership must examine the inner life from which its visible work grows.

Work can become a refuge from honest prayer. It is possible to serve frequently while becoming impatient, emotionally absent, or resistant to correction. These patterns do not mean that every tired person has failed spiritually. They are invitations to pay attention. Exhaustion may have practical, relational, medical, or psychological causes as well as spiritual dimensions. Wise soul care refuses both simplistic diagnosis and the habit of ignoring warning signs.

Mark describes apostles so busy that they cannot find time to eat, and Jesus invites them to rest. Embodied limits matter. Sleep, meals, appropriate treatment, and shared responsibilities are not competitors to faith. They belong to responsible stewardship of the life through which we serve. A leader who cannot stop may be carrying too much, working within an unhealthy structure, or seeking worth through being indispensable. Often more than one factor is involved.

Psalm 139 provides a language of examination directed toward God. We ask to be searched because self-understanding is incomplete. The goal is not endless self-surveillance or public disclosure of every painful memory. It is truth in the presence of God, supported by trustworthy relationships. Some matters belong with a pastor, a qualified counselor, or a safeguarding professional rather than in a group discussion. Privacy and appropriate care are part of wisdom.

A sustainable rhythm must be realistic. Choose small commitments that fit actual responsibilities and can be reviewed. A ten-minute time with Scripture, a protected meal, one honest conversation, and a recurring rest period may matter more than an ambitious plan abandoned after two days. The group should ask not only what each person will practice but what support makes that practice possible. Soul care becomes communal when we share work instead of simply advising tired people to try harder.

WEEK 3 • GATHER & RESPOND

From study to practice

Observe the text

• What words describe the relationship between Christ and his disciples in John 15?

• What practical need does Jesus acknowledge in Mark 6:30–32?

Discuss together

1. How do you recognize the difference between ordinary fatigue and a pattern needing additional care?

2. Which responsibility could be shared, simplified, or paused without neglecting someone?

3. What helps you pray honestly rather than perform competence?

4. What small rhythm would make room for both dependence on Christ and bodily recovery?

Group exercise

Draft a simple weekly rhythm with four commitments: Scripture and prayer, physical rest, a trustworthy conversation, and one practical limit. For each, name a realistic time, a likely obstacle, and the support needed. Share only what you are comfortable sharing.

This week’s practice

Try the rhythm for seven days. Record what helped and what needs adjustment; do not grade yourself by emotional intensity. Use one day from Morning Mercies for a longer personal reflection.

Facilitator care

Avoid diagnosing mental-health conditions or suggesting that prayer replaces care. Persistent distress, risk of self-harm, or abuse requires appropriate professional or emergency support. Group members should not be asked to carry a crisis alone.

Close in prayer

Pray for those carrying heavy responsibilities, for trustworthy support, and for the courage to receive help without shame.

BUILT FOR BATTLE • WEEK 4 OF 4

Sent to love well

Read together: Micah 6:6–8; Luke 10:25–37; Galatians 6:9–10

Turn truth, servant leadership, and soul care into a practical, accountable act of mercy.

Micah confronts the idea that increasingly impressive offerings can compensate for a life detached from justice and mercy. Humble walking with God joins worship to the way we treat others. The question for a community is not only what it believes or how sincerely it gathers. It is whether its decisions, relationships, and resources bear the marks of the God it worships. Spiritual readiness that never becomes love has missed its purpose.

In Jesus' story, the Samaritan sees a wounded man and gives practical care. He approaches, treats wounds, arranges transport, and provides for continued help. The story invites us to notice how mercy moves beyond a feeling. It also challenges the impulse to make compassion contingent on cultural similarity or group membership. Jesus directs the questioner away from drawing boundaries around obligation and toward becoming a neighbor through action.

Good intentions need wise planning. Communities should listen before assuming what people need, obtain consent before sharing stories, and make only promises they can keep. Working alongside an established local organization may be better than inventing a new initiative. Care can include a meal, transport, a referral, advocacy, a listening visit, or a change in the way resources are distributed. The scale should fit the group's actual ability to follow through.

Galatians encourages persistence in doing good. Fruit can take time, and discouragement can make a group either quit or overreach. Accountability helps. Name one achievable action, an owner, a date, a budget if needed, and a way to assess whether the recipient experienced meaningful help. Do not measure success by photographs or public recognition. A person's dignity is more important than the visibility of our service.

This final week draws the study together. Truth keeps compassion honest. Servant leadership keeps power oriented toward others. Soul care helps service remain sustainable instead of driven by guilt or the need to be indispensable. The result should be a community that prays, acts, reviews, and learns. Our task is not to save the world through a single project. It is to obey Christ faithfully in the place and relationships entrusted to us.

WEEK 4 • GATHER & RESPOND

From study to practice

Observe the text

• What does Micah contrast with costly religious offerings?

• List the Samaritan’s concrete actions and the resources they require.

Discuss together

1. Who might our group overlook because of familiarity, difference, or inconvenience?

2. How can we listen to the person receiving help instead of designing care around our preferences?

3. Which safeguards will protect privacy, finances, and vulnerable people?

4. What will we continue after this study, and how will we know it is helping?

Group exercise

Create one modest group mercy plan: need verified with consent, specific action, responsible person, completion date, resources, safeguarding considerations, and review date. Use the Discernment Checklist to test the plan. Do not collect sensitive personal information in shared notes.

This week’s practice

Complete or begin the agreed action within two weeks. Check in respectfully with the recipient or partner organization. Meet once more to review what helped, what should change, and which spiritual rhythm each person will continue.

Facilitator care

Choose a safe, proportionate project. Work through established safeguarding procedures for children or vulnerable adults. Obtain permission before any photograph or story; never make help conditional on publicity or participation in religious activities.

Close in prayer

Thank God for specific growth over the four weeks. Pray for your neighbors and for endurance, wisdom, humility, and practical love in the next season.