

## A NOTE TO PARENTS

"Knights in armor," superheroes, and other characters who do battle against the forces of evil, appeal enormously to children. Adults may be uncomfortable with the violent or militaristic imagery in such stories, and in children's play and fantasy about them. Since we wish our children to learn to live peacefully, we can discourage them from framing this mythical conflict in highly literal and realistic terms, and from playing with toys and video games that blatantly encourage the enjoyment of violence for its own sake. But for children it is vitally important to organize their world into good and evil and to imaginatively live through, and act out, the conflict between them.

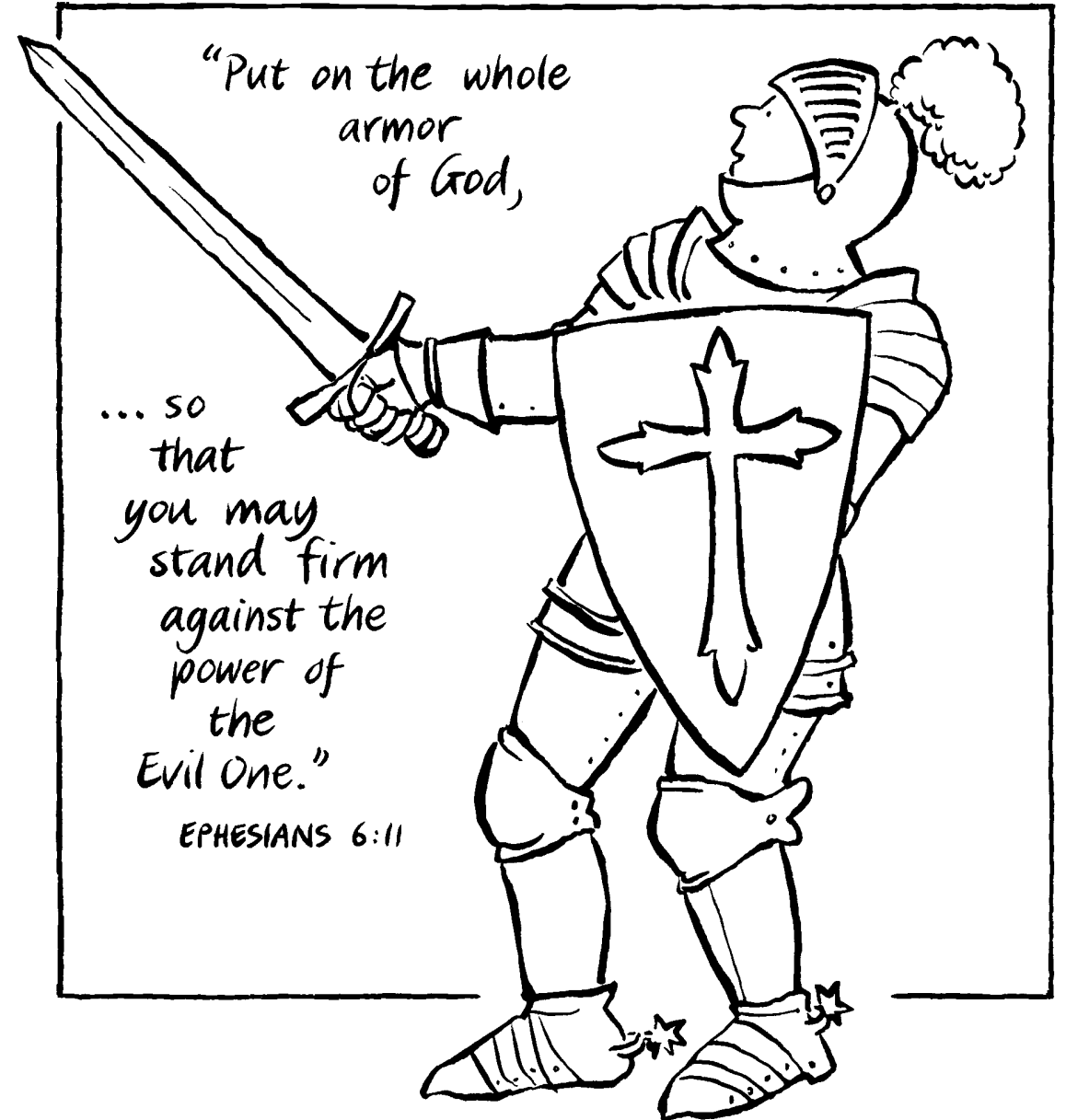
It's probably not helpful to intervene in children's fantasies of heroic battles by asking them, "How do you suppose the dragon feels?" The dragon is not supposed to feel: it simply represents Evil, or the Enemy. We can (gently) remind our children that the most important battles are those we fight within our own hearts, against our own destructive impulses: meanness, greed, selfishness, laziness, deceitfulness, and general not-caring. Deep within themselves, children know this already: they know that learning to overcome fear, and side with their own better nature against their own worse nature, is one of the most important tasks they face as they grow up. It is exactly this imperative, inarticulate but urgently present within them, that they labor to carry out through their involvement with stories of mythical struggle. At their age, that is the only way they can frame it—and they need to do it themselves. So let your small children do most of their fantasizing in peace, free from adult interpretation. As they grow older, they will be ready to understand stories that are overtly about *moral* conflict and *moral* courage, or that provide moral labels for a story of heroic struggle. Some wonderful stories to begin with are the *Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis, and a superbly illustrated version of *Pilgrim's Progress*, called *Dangerous Journey*, published by Eerdmans. These are terrific books for adults, too!

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In the old stories, knights and heroes fought against enemies and dragons.

They wore armor, to protect them from the enemy's sword and the dragon's teeth.



We have a fight to fight, too. Our enemies are inside us, in our hearts. We fight against meanness, selfishness, and lies.

God gives us the armor to help us. He gives us love, and caring, and truth.



Being Jesus's friend is not always easy. God's Kingdom is not finished yet. There are lots of things that keep it from growing. Lies and meanness and laziness and not caring can hurt God's Kingdom, and hurt us.

Jesus wants us to fight these things. We fight them by being loving and caring. When we love other people, we can fight for God's Kingdom together. We help each other, and Jesus helps us.

Help the knights reach the dragon, and fight it.

