

Like Emily, I've had little portions of Scripture pop into my mind, and when I notice them and let them percolate, I feel better. The one that came to me unbidden recently is "having done all, to stand" I knew where it was from so I looked it up, found a translation I liked. The one Noah read today. And as it I let it percolate, it surprised me by encouraging me toward the practice of self-kindness—though the words "self-kindness" are not in the text. Sometimes we have to scratch before we can sniff. The self-kindness connection won't be immediately apparent, but I hope it will reveal itself, with some unpacking.

Here's the portion, using the David Bentley Hart translation, one that is willing to be clunky in order to bring out the nuances of original Greek words. ***"Put on God's panoply, so that you are able to withstand the Slanderer's wiles...take up God's panoply, so that on the evil day you may be able to resist and, having done all, to stand."***

A little big-picture background. This is from a letter to the Ephesians—a community in what became modern day Turkey. That said, an early manuscript of this letter doesn't include "to the church in Ephesus." Likewise, Ephesians is part of the "disputed letters of Paul." Scholars are quite sure that 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, were written by Paul. But Ephesians and a handful of others letters ascribed to Paul, were likely written by someone else "in the tradition of Paul." The conventions for authorship were very different in the ancient world. It was common to write something in the name of a famous person, as though that person were writing it. This was not considered unethical. It was an accepted convention. The disputed letters are in general less radical, than the undisputed letters of Paul. The disputed letters are more tame—more concerned to uphold cultural norms in the family, they describe a church that is becoming more institutional—less on the fly.

That said, let's enter the thought world of this ancient bit of writing until it yields its treasure for today: a perspective that promotes self-kindness when we're going through a trying time.

“Put on God’s panoply, so that you are able to withstand the Slanderer’s wiles...take up God’s panoply, so that on the evil day you may be able to resist and, having done all, to stand.”

The unknown author is addressing people who live in precarious times. Economic disruptions, plagues, political instability, breakdowns in the social order, times of mob rule, military takeovers, natural disasters. The author’s phrase for this is “the evil day.” Not a 24-hour day, but an unspecified stretch of bad things happening. We see more evil days on the horizon, don’t we? Even life in the best of times has “evil days,” if only a personal level.

My friend Joan lost her dad unexpectedly, a complicated loss for lots of reasons in the middle of this crazy year. I thought Joan described the evil day to a T. She said, “it was rough—have you ever been in fight and flight mode day after day for weeks? I was losing things, forgetting things, my pulse was racing, the whole 9 yards. Thankfully, I had some practice meditating so I was using that, and a supportive group of friends really helped—but WOW!” Everyone in our group knew exactly what she was talking about, having gone through our own evil days.

So this portion of Scripture is about going through, and preparing for “evil days”

Now, that weird word **panoply**: *Put on God’s panoply* (rhymes with canopy) *so that you are able to withstand the Slanderer’s wiles* The translator, David Bentley Hart, has made a very careful decision not to translate this word, as others do, “armor.” Despite the fact that all the other metaphors in this section (verses I haven’t included) use military metaphors for non-military things: shield of faith, breastplate of justice, and so on. Instead of “armor” he uses panoply. I say Thank God! I say Praise the Lord and Pass the Pop Tarts, because I’m sick and tired of military metaphors these days. It’s one thing for a minority group of Jewish Jesus followers in a small conclave surrounded by troops of the Roman Empire, to use metaphors like this. But as soon as Christianity was coopted by the Roman Empire as its state religion, with the emperor Constantine putting the symbol of cross—a symbol of vulnerability, not strength—on a Roman flag to be flown over armies bent on military conquest...those military metaphors lost their original context. But that’s not why David Bentley Hart chose the word “panoply” here, instead

of armor. His translation is all about hewing closely to the original language, even if it makes the translation sound clunky. In this case, he did it because the Greek word is *panoplia* (a feminine noun in Greek) that has a broader meaning than armor; the first half of the word means all or full and the second part mean a set of tools, instruments, or armor. So the original Greek word has connotations missing from “armor.” Panoply means:

- A splendid or striking array or arrangement.
- Ceremonial attire with all accessories.
- Something that covers and protects.

What if there really is a spending or striking array or arrangement of things—divine things—that help us make it through evil days? Not just the few mentioned in surrounding verses (faith, justice, gospel of peace) If it’s a real divine panoply it’s not limited to a few things—it’s a splendid array of things. Over past year, I’ve discovered television dramas and they have enriched my life and help me through some evil days. I found a shoe brand that cured my plantar fasciitis and is keeping me walking which is so helpful. Yes, I have my praying and meditation practices and I get sustenance from Sunday morning. But we’re talking about a splendid and striking array, a panoply of divine resource.

Second, this phase “withstand the Slanderer’s wiles.” “Devil” is the less literal translation. The ancients like to personify things. Just like we do. Only when they do it, we call it primitive and when we do it (death is the Grim Reaper, that Oreos is calling my name) it’s charming.

“Slanderer” is a voice using words used against people; mean, harmful, accusing words. “Wiles” means “crafty, sneaky, deceitful, behind the scenes”; a modern equivalent might be gaslighting or passive-aggressive words that dodge the light of day. Most of us have a slandering voice inside our heads that takes advantage of us when our guard is down, finds its way in like water into an old basement. And sometimes when we’re battling that voice inside our heads it can be a relief to turn the voice on other people, to give ourselves a break. But mostly it begins as a voice in our own heads.

The phrase “withstand the Slanderer’s wiles”—conjures for me an image of a windstorm of words, a steady stream of words. This is something we need to withstand—like a

palm tree in Florida during hurricane force winds. It bends but doesn't break, and when the high winds have calmed down—there it is, a nice Florida palm tree, returned to vertical.

When we are going through it, the deceitful chatter of the inner bully—moralistic chatter half the time, fault-finding chatter, is a real life-sapper. Isn't it good to know that's not the divine voice in our heads? That voice has nothing to do with God. We can name it for what is: a crafty, sneaking, conniving, undermining, slandering voice. It's opportunistic this voice: it amplifies with lack of sleep, in times of high anxiety, in times when our social matrix is riddled with elevated anger and fear.

When you're going through an evil day, be on the lookout for that voice inside your head. Notice and name it for is—not a reliable voice, not a divine voice, not a trustworthy voice, but something to withstand, to resist. Maybe if you notice a pattern of recurring inner self-criticism, find a trusted friend and disclose some your inner chatter to them. So they can say, "You know that's not true don't you? You know that's not you, don't you?" Sometimes just disclosing this inner chatter is embarrassing, but don't let that embarrassment keep you from sharing it with a sympathetic trusted person. Half the time, when we say it out loud we realize it's ridiculous. But listen to them when they say, "You know that's not you, don't you? You know that's not true don't you?" When we stumble into a beehive and get multiple stings, some of the stingers we can pull out ourselves. But others we can't reach. So let someone pull the stinger out for you. And be ready to return the favor is someone is brave enough to share their inner chatter with you. We can be part of God's panoply, the divine splendid array, for times of trouble.

"Put on God's panoply, so that you are able to withstand the Slanderer's wiles...take up God's panoply, so that on the evil day you may be able to resist and, having done all, to stand."

Having done all, to stand. That's the goal when we're going through tough times. Bending but not breaking, or if breaking, in ways that lets the light in. Tottering, fine. Leaning hard to the left or the right. No problem. Falling down, perhaps, but able when it's past to get back up.

Having done all, to stand. A modest goal. The goal is not to excel. The goal is not to thrive. The goal is not to build character. The goal is not to improve or grow, or progress. The goal is not to write an award-winning break up song or turn it all into a wildly popular podcast. The goal is to stand. To be there. The word for resurrection in many languages is to stand up from the dead. In the earliest resurrection appearances in the gospels, Jesus is standing. Not sitting, not walking, not running, not flying. Standing. In fact, only once, the final appearing in the gospel of John is he doing anything but standing, the time he's sitting around the charcoal fire when the forlorn disciples are out fishing, catching nothing. Mostly, he's just standing. Even in Stephen's vision of the risen Jesus is standing at the right hand of God, whereas the usual image is being seated at the right hand of God. Having done all, to stand.

Doesn't even matter the shape you're in when you're standing. Or sitting up if that's a better metaphor in your case. Doesn't matter how you look standing, what you're wearing, how woozy you may feel, whether you need a cane or a pair of crutches or a walker, or a few teammates to hold you up. Just the unadorned word, stand, that's all that matters. And having done all (meaning having gone through it all), to stand.

Why is it when we are going through it we tend to get harder on ourselves, instead of kinder?

Does it work with kids? They are struggling through some challenging task and we yell at them to try harder, point out all their flaws? We know how that story goes.

No, when we're going through, that, more than any other time, is the time to practice self-kindness. Because all we need to do with be standing when the storm is past, or (a close second) able to get back up with a little help from our friends.

And if we have a problem with the practice of self-kindness (as many of us do) we can remember that when we are kind to ourselves, the people around us, the people we care about, the people depending on us, they will benefit. Love your neighbor as yourself.