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What shall I wear? How many of you have ever asked that question? It's a common dilemma, and probably an issue you've faced a time or two. Maybe you've even asked the following kinds of questions: Does this shirt go with these pants? Does this color look good on me? What shoes should I wear with this outfit?

Shoes: something most of us would never leave the house without wearing, but it's amazing what kinds of shoes there are today. From informal flip flops to elegant high heels, shoes come in all sizes and shapes and colors. Even the cost can vary from under \$20 to over \$500. In an online survey about how much one pays for a pair of shoes, out of almost 1100 responses, 50% indicated they spend between \$40 and \$100. Surprisingly, however, 99 people indicated they spend over \$500 for a pair of shoes.¹ They must shop in a different store than I do!

This week I heard a news story on NPR about a new pair of Nike basketball shoes that sells for

\$315, complete with a motion sensing device that can measure how high you jump.² I wonder if it also measures the jump in shoe prices.

It seems as though we go to a lot of effort to make sure our shoes are just right, and it's something even the writer of the letter to the Ephesians understood. Some suggest that the apostle Paul may have written this letter, but due to its difference in writing style from his other letters, some scholars have suggested that it may have been one of Paul's followers who wrote the letter. Whoever was the author, the writer penned this general letter to a group of churches, striving to encourage them in the midst of difficult times.

The author was concerned about more than just what shoes to wear, for he made a list of spiritual clothing. The writer used the common imagery of military apparel, from the helmet of salvation on the top of his head to the shoes on his feet, complete with a shield of faith, breastplate of righteousness, and belt of truth. The writer assumed there would

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be a cosmic battle, with forces of evil fighting the forces of good, and he warned Christians to be prepared to fight by wearing what he called the armor of God.

There are some today who continue to view the world in this manner, seeing cosmic evil forces working in the world. It's common imagery in media such as the *Left Behind* series and other apocalyptic thrillers.

On the one hand, I can understand why many view the world as a place filled with evil, for the media often reminds us of bombings, shootings, and one disaster after another. The world is a scary place, and sometimes we long for an explanation of why these bad things happen. Some find comfort in the idea that cosmic battles are going on, with the result that we humans face the shrapnel of their encounters. With this view of the world, it would make sense to want to wear some type of spiritual armor.

On the other hand, many find this view of cosmic powers battling each other troubling into today's understanding of how the world works. I don't tend to view the world as a battle between cosmic powers, do you? Yes, things go wrong, people harm one another, and disasters happen; but I see these events as natural consequences of how the world operates and how people treat one another, not as evil forces battling one another. The forces of greed, the lust for power, and the desire for control often lead some people to cause harm to others. But there are also many kind and gentle people in the world.

Instead of focusing on the battle apparel described in this letter to the Ephesians, I instead noticed the footwear. Did you notice what the writer suggested we should wear? "Whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." In the midst of the imagery of shields and helmets and armor, the writer encourages us to wear shoes to proclaim the good news of peace.

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I wonder what shoes of peace might look like. Just imagine where you might go and what you might do if you were wearing shoes of peace.

One shoe salesman wondered a similar question in the midst of a disaster about twelve years ago.

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia, Wayne Elsey...felt compelled to do something. Like many of us, he did not know what to do. He was at home one night, watching TV and he saw a picture of a single shoe washing up on the beach. That triggered a few calls to some other executives in the footwear industry and the subsequent donation of a quarter of a million shoes to victims in the devastated countries.

A few months later when Katrina hit, Wayne called the same group of friends, and... [they] sent over a million pairs of shoes down to the gulf coast communities affected by the hurricane. In all honesty, he admits that he did not expect such an immediate and successful

turnout. This left him wondering, why not start a non-profit and do this all the time? One year later, Soles4Souls was formally created.³

This organization has delivered over 19 million pairs of shoes to 125 countries by taking new or gently used shoes from shoe stores, churches, schools, and others. That is a huge project of creating shoes of peace, gospel shoes that spread a message of good news around the globe.

Lizzy Beach, who spoke with us a few weeks ago on Wednesday night, wrote in her blog while serving in Africa. She learned how the African greeting of one another might help us think about our greetings in this country:

to show respect and honor someone, you shake hands with both hands, or when you're handing something to someone, you give with both hands. And as with many societies, it is offensive to lead with the left hand, or offer the left hand. I believe I will keep that practice of both hands when I move back to the US—

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because the statement made when you offer both I believe holds great symbolism with one's presence in the moment. Or with greeting: Swazis ALWAYS greet, even when in a hurry. They always ask 'how are you [unjani]?' And the person always replies 'I'm fine [ngiyaphila].' In the US, I generally oppose this greeting because is superficial in nature, and people generally aren't interested in how you are, answered in one word. But I have come to see this concept of basic greeting in a new light. It is not so much about wanting to know how one is doing, but it is in the consistency in asking the question; or rather, acknowledging the other person. The greeting serves as a gateway to conversation, not simply as conversation itself.⁴

Wearing Gospel Shoes means we bring hope and peace to world, possibly by doing great things such as organizing a way to send shoes to protect the feet of those around the world, or even giving up some of our shoes that we don't really need. But wearing Gospel Shoes also includes the way we greet one another, offering a listening ear, or by truly greeting one another with concern.

This week as you put on your shoes, think about where they might take you. Imagine how you might bring a message of hope to someone who is searching for meaning. Imagine how you might bring acts of peace to those who find themselves in a conflict. Imagine you are wearing Gospel Shoes that can guide you to the places in your day where a kind word is needed. And then get ready to walk to those places you imagine, being ready to listen. To offer words of hope. To act in ways of peace.

¹ shoes.about.com/gi/pages/poll.htm?poll_id=8585185566&linkback=app1.kuhf.org/articles/npr1345548581-Nike-Set-To-Release-Its-Priciest-Shoe.html

³ www.soles4souls.org/about/history.html

⁴ Lizzy Beach blog, Dec. 6, 2011, <http://lizzybeach.tumblr.com/>