

# How to Be Spiritually Strong Series

## The Weapon of Faith (Eph. 6:16)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# The Weapon of Faith

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Trusting God with the Results

1. There is a group of us who are very excited today. The reason we are excited is because we have been working hard and developing a welcome ministry for our church, and it is finally getting implemented. We have all the basic building blocks in place and we are starting to do what we have been planning for a long time.
2. Our new Connection Center is now operational. It is up and running. We have a group of volunteers trained and willing to serve our church in an area of need. As the Outreach Team prepared for the Connection Center training and as the workers were being trained, it is clear that we are moving forward trusting God to bless the work of our hands. As this ministry was dedicated to God several times, we have prayed and expect God to bless us as we act in faithfulness to Him.
3. Both the Outreach Team and the workers have asked God to give us opportunities to make a difference in people's lives and for God's Spirit to change people's hearts as we do this. We recognize our need for God's help, and we acknowledge our dependence on Him. We truly believe God will show up and work when we get our entire outreach ministry functional—the Connection Center is only one small part of our plan.
4. As our church gets out into the community, seeks opportunities to serve and share the gospel, as well as preparing to welcome new people to our church, we anticipate that God will show up and change lives. The reason we are doing all this work is because we know that God is still at work building His kingdom and He will use us to do so in this community. As long as we return to God, He will return to us. Our confidence of this comes from God's faithful nature.
5. The attitude and mindset of both the Outreach Team and the Connection Center workers expresses faith in God.

B. Faith means people are trusting God to do what He said He was going to do. They view God (and Jesus) as a reliable person who can be counted on. While faith seems straightforward and simple, it is anything but that, as those who have attempted to live a life of faith soon discover. Living with an attitude of complete trust in God is not easy or automatic, but the benefits that come to us when our faith in God becomes stable is well worth all the effort it takes to secure it. Ephesians 6:16 informs us the next piece of armor that provides strength for the spiritual battles is faith.

## II. Understanding Faith

A. The fourth spiritual weapon listed by Paul that enables disciples to be spiritually strong through the Holy Spirit is, <sup>16</sup> "in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*." (Eph. 6:16). Paul tells us the nature of spiritual strength; it is cumulative as each piece of armor is added and works with all the other pieces of

armor (“in addition to all” v. 16). In this statement, Paul reminds us again of the importance of “the full armor of God” (v. 13).

- B. Spiritual strength requires “the shield of faith” (v. 16) which functions by making disciples “able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*” (v. 16). While faith is a central idea and theme throughout the Bible, curiously, it is frequently misunderstood.<sup>1</sup> What is clear is that faith is really important both to Jesus and to God the Father. In fact, God will never be pleased with anyone who does not have faith in Him (“<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Heb. 11:6). Anyone who is not fully convinced that God exists and that He is good to those who passionately pursue Him will never please God, even if they do a lot of religious activity. As a deep, personal conviction, individuals must know God exists, that He is a good person (the most moral and upright person that will ever exist), and that pursuing Him is a noble and worthwhile endeavor that is never a waste of time. These are the basic building blocks of Biblical faith with which God is pleased.
- C. Faith is so foundational to life as a disciple that it defines a Christians’ way of life according to Hebrews 10:38-39:
- <sup>38</sup> BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Heb. 10:38-39)
- D. God expects a strong faith. For Paul, faith is always complete trust in Jesus<sup>2</sup>: a faith that keeps individuals closely attached to God no matter what (“faith to the preserving of the soul” v. 39), which is contrasted from a weak faith that causes a person to “shrink back to destruction” (v. 39). Those who abandon God when life gets hard do not have the type of faith that pleases God.
- E. So, we must ask ourselves the question: what is faith? In the church, many people talk about “taking it on faith”. Usually what this means is, “I am going to accept what God says and trust Him, even if I have no good reason to do so.” Lots of people understand faith to be a blind leap in the dark in a way that is separated from thoughtfulness, reason, and perhaps even wisdom. Those who think faith is something that exists when we don’t understand have an unbiblical, false, and destructive view of faith that comes from those who oppose God—those outside the church who don’t accept the reliability of the Bible. In this understanding of faith, faith is a sheer act of will that simply decides to accept something without any, or certainly proper, justification.<sup>3</sup> This is not real faith but a false substitute. This type of faith causes great harm to those who adopt it. This view of faith usually keeps people lazy spiritually—there is no need to grow and learn if this is how a person defines faith. The only way to increase faith on this view

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<sup>1</sup> Faith is one of the three main virtues of Christianity (1 Cor. 13:13).

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, [\*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians\*](#), The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 212.

<sup>3</sup> “Faith is now understood as a blind act of will, a decision to believe something that is either independent of reason or that is a simple choice to believe while ignoring the paltry lack of evidence for what is believed.” J.P. Moreland *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 25

is to have more self-determination and stronger willpower. The problem is obvious: our human strength is not enough.

- F. If faith is not based on knowledge, it is meaningless. Those are some intentionally strong words! Some may even be offended by them. Others may get mad that these words were spoken. However, these words are not mine, but the apostle Paul's: "<sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." (1 Cor. 15:14). If faith is not grounded in reality, facts, knowledge, and truth, it does us no good.<sup>4</sup> Biblical faith is "in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Subjectively tricking ourselves into thinking something is true doesn't help us. Jesus said essentially the same thing when He stated worship must be done in truth—according to what is real (Jn. 4:24). A lot of Christians have an unbiblical understanding of faith. Ignorant acceptance and blind trust is not a type of faith that pleases God.
- G. Further, the way faith works is that faith grows and has more of an influence in a person's life as a person's conviction grows. As Paul puts it, faith becomes effective through knowledge ("<sup>6</sup> and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake." Phm. 6). Instruction leads to being rooted, built up, and established in faith (Col. 2:7). True faith not just learns facts but becomes convinced of that which is learned (2 Tim. 3:14)—there is a persuasion aspect. This "become convinced of" element is what is most often lacking because false versions of faith are adopted instead. Until a person is actually persuaded the teachings of Jesus are true, faith will be weak at best.<sup>5</sup>
- H. Faith is an attitude of trust that develops from a knowledge of God and Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Biblical faith has three elements: 1) A conviction, a firm persuasion, producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth (2 Thess. 2:11-12), 2) a personal surrender to Him (Jn. 1:12), and 3) conduct inspired by such surrender (2 Cor. 5:7).<sup>7</sup> Biblical faith involves the mind, a personal response to what is true, and a lifestyle that comports with what is known to be true. Nothing about Biblical faith is a blind leap or merely an act of the will. Faith, in its subjective sense, refers to a person's confidence in God.<sup>8</sup>
- I. Here is why the way we understand faith is so important: only the true Bible-based view of faith will produce the spiritual strength we need for difficult times and spiritual battles. If we get our understanding of faith wrong, it could cost us our soul. Wishful thinking or a blind leap will

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<sup>4</sup> Even though faith, trust in God, is developed from knowledge and truth it doesn't mean faith understands everything and has all the answers it wants. There are plenty of times God is trusted, based on good reasons and what is known, to accept that which is unknown.

<sup>5</sup> A good resource that helps explain the relationship between knowledge and faith is Tim Pickavance's book *Knowledge for the Love of God: Why Your Heart Needs Your Mind*.

<sup>6</sup> In reference to Jesus, faith is, "that act of the soul whereby it rests on Christ crucified for pardon and life, and that upon the warrant of the promise". William Gurnall and John Campbell, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 426. Faith trusts Jesus to provide the rescue of our soul and everything we need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

<sup>7</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 222.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 563, Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H Academic, 2016), 216.

never produce the type of faith we need to be spiritually strong when it matters most. Far too many Christians end up being spiritually weak because of a false view of faith.

- J. The false version of faith actually keeps individuals from pursuing the type of faith that will make them spiritually strong. As a result of having an incorrect view of faith, people end up struggling much more than is necessary, and that breaks my heart. This false version of faith crumbles when life gets difficult and it causes disciples not to have anything solid on which to stand when the going gets tough. The reason? Because we are relying on ourselves and our own strength when we are at our weakest. This is a bad plan. I want to protect people from this very unpleasant and disturbing experience. In difficult times, our human strength fails. If our faith is based on our own human strength in the form of our will, our faith will fail and we will experience a crisis of faith when life becomes hard. In these life moments, the only source of strength powerful enough to carry us through is the strength God provides through a Biblical faith.
- K. When we are left to rely on the strength of our will in difficult times, it often does not end well. I have seen this pattern repeat over and over again. There is a big difference between genuine trust in God and a pretended faith (1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 1:5). It is when we are under spiritual attack or facing some difficult situation when our doubts are largest and the strength of our will is weakest. Yet, this is what must be relied on if the unbiblical type of faith is adopted. It is almost inevitable that those who understand faith as a blind leap will face a crisis of faith when life gets hard and the temptation to abandon God will be much greater. Pursuing a Bible-based type of faith can prevent this from happening. Understanding faith in the right way can preserve a person's soul.

### III. The Weapon of Faith

- A. As a spiritual weapon, faith protects disciples from the attacks of the enemy by believing the statements and promises of God while standing firmly as a result with great confidence.<sup>9</sup> Trust in God (faith), when understood this way, is a powerful weapon for our souls. This weapon is so powerful, in fact, that it overcomes both Satan (1 Pet. 5:9) and the world (1 Jn. 5:4). How does an attitude of trust in God function as a spiritual weapon that provides strength?
- B. First and primarily, genuine faith motivates Jesus to act on our behalf, making our prayers more effective (Mt. 9:27-29, Mk. 11:20-25, Jas. 1:6-7, 5:15). When disciples live their lives with a deep trust in God based on knowledge of who He is, Jesus responds at a much higher rate than when this faith is lacking. We see Jesus being responsive to faith many times throughout the gospels. When in the middle of a spiritual battle, having an effective prayer life is extremely helpful. Jesus is the One who defeated Satan, and having Him as an ally in spiritual battles is an effective weapon.
- C. Second, faith functions as a spiritual weapon when it protects us from fear, and fear so often prevents us from obeying God. According to Jesus, a lack of fear is the result of trusting Him (Mk. 4:35-41, Lk. 8:22-25). The disciples were corrected by Jesus after they responded with fear to a significant storm on the Sea of Galilee. They approached Jesus and woke Him up from His

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 6:16, Rm. 4:19-20, Col. 1:23, 1 Tim. 3:13

sleep in order for Him to rescue them. When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were amazed at what happened. Jesus responded to all this by telling the disciples, if they had faith, they would not have been afraid. Being able to face difficult circumstances and spiritual attacks without fear makes disciples strong.

- D. Third, faith functions as a spiritual weapon by providing strength, as it provides good discipline and stability (Col. 2:5). Discipline, healthy habits, and consistency all provide strength by carrying us through weak seasons of life. Even when our heart isn't in something or we just don't feel like doing what we normally do, living consistently everyday can overcome such situations. When a person trusts God, they will act according to that trust on a regular basis. This will be true even when they don't have answers, when doubts creep in, or when life becomes difficult.
- E. Fourth, Faith results in individuals being protected by the power of God in regard to their salvation (1 Pet. 1:15, Lk. 22:31-32, Jn. 18:9). When a person expresses genuine and sincere trust in Jesus, Jesus watches over that person, protects them, intercedes for them, and brings them safely into His kingdom without losing anyone who belongs to Him. Every disciple's individual salvation is protected by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:4-5). No matter what a person must face in this life, Jesus will provide the strength and power they need to endure any set of circumstances God's asks them to walk through.
- F. Fifth and finally, faith produces the ability to persevere even during persecution and afflictions (2 Thess. 1:4). As this church's faith was "greatly enlarged" (v. 3) and still growing, they had the strength they needed to live faithfully, even during the difficult times. While this church still had to endure their sufferings and wait patiently for relief which was to occur at Jesus's return (v. 7), this church had what it needed to stand firm (2 Thess. 2:15). While the Bible mentions other ways faith functions as a spiritual weapon, this short list is substantial and reveals the valuable role trust in God plays in our spiritual lives.
- G. Do you live as if these life benefits matter to you? Do they matter enough to motivate you to pursue a deep trust in God? Knowledgeable and experienced disciples are convinced having a deep-seated trust in God's dependability makes their lives better. They value faith and make it a primary priority in their life. Holding tightly to God without wavering is viewed as success and a worthy goal.
- H. Imagine what your life would be like if you experienced all the benefits of an unwavering trust in God in every circumstance of life. How would your life be different? How would past situations you've encountered have turned out more positively with a stronger faith? A good exercise is to meditate on the role a complete trust in God would play in our lives. Once we have a better picture of what this could look like, we can then begin to strive to live in a manner consistent with the way our lives could look like if our faith was stronger. By doing this, we can also develop a deeper understanding of the importance of faith in our lives.
- I. Most disciples have experienced times when their faith was challenged or wavered. How did that feel? These unpleasant experiences can cause panic in our souls. These experiences can stick with us for a long time. When our doubts get the best of us, it can feel like our entire worlds are falling apart. Imagine developing such a strong faith that these type of experience

will never happen again. Is this worth all the time, effort, study, and determination of will it takes to obtain it? I can tell you from experience it is! The confidence and overall peace of mind that comes to our lives when a strong faith exists in our lives is absolutely priceless. Those who have it would not trade it for millions of dollars.

#### IV. How to Take Up Faith

- A. The New Testament provides a long list of ways faith (trust in God) functions as a spiritual weapon and source of strength for those who follow Jesus. Out of all the pieces of spiritual armor, the Bible probably gives us the most information about faith. The remaining question becomes, how can the cry of the disciples be fulfilled in our own lives, “Increase our faith!” (Lk. 17:5).<sup>10</sup> What can we do as followers of Jesus to develop and strengthen our trust in God? What can be done practically to increase and strengthen our faith? While praying and asking God to supply more faith is a good place to start, there are specific action steps disciples can take to grow their faith.
- B. Only one important suggestion will be offered. Find godly examples to follow and learn from them (“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7).<sup>11</sup> One of the most important steps in developing Biblical faith is to find examples of it and learn from those examples so a clear understanding of what a life of faith entails becomes cemented in our understanding. Certainly, the best example is Jesus. Assuming all genuine disciples are already looking to Jesus for an example of what a life of faith looks like, it is also helpful to move to other disciples who are alive today and currently living by faith. These are the types of people we are looking for.
- C. As we are searching for these good examples, we must keep in mind we are looking for something specific. We are attempting to identify someone whose life looks similar to the life of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). The reason we accept them as our model is because their life is patterned after the life of Jesus. Quality examples of people living a well-developed life of faith is not as common as one might think. These examples must be chosen carefully and selectively. Just because a person holds a certain position in the church does not automatically mean they are a good example of a life of faith. Again, we should be looking for a thoroughgoing likeness to Jesus to help us identify good examples from which we can learn and follow.
- D. Another factor to consider when choosing an example of faith is to give priority to individuals who have already passed through difficult and challenging seasons of life. These individuals will have come out the other side of suffering and affliction while remaining faithful to God both throughout the difficulty and on the other side. In fact, those who trust God and suffer well often will have a stronger, not a weaker, faith following pain and suffering. There will be no hint of bitterness or anger in their hearts. These are the kinds of people who prove and demonstrate the strength of their faith in God. Even when things are difficult, they remain faithfully stable. Those who have a crisis of faith when life gets challenging or they face a trauma are not the ones you want to select as an example of a strong faith.

<sup>10</sup> See also the desperate cry of a father pleading for his demonized son (Mk. 9:24).

<sup>11</sup> 1 Tim. 4:12, 2 Tim. 3:10

E. In short, developing a lifestyle of faith involves living under the influence of a mentor from whom we can learn how to live a life filled with trust in God. How do they handle the difficulties they face? What are their priorities? How does their trust in God affect the way they act and react? What are the differences between their life of faith and the lives of others? What does faith look like when we are hurting, frustrated, or full of joy? Good role models can help us crystalize our understanding of what a life of faith is.

**V. Conclusion**

- A. My hope and desire for all disciples is for them to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard” (Col. 1:23). I want every one of you to increase your faith until it is firmly established and immovable so your soul will be preserved until the very end. I want to see each of you in the kingdom of God in eternity.
- B. I know that God is faithful, He will strengthen and protect us from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3). Trusting this fact makes a significant difference in our spiritual lives. When people possess a strong, unwavering trust in God, the overall tone and default feeling in their soul changes in a positive way.

**VI. Questions for Further Thought**

- A. When have you trusted God and seen Him respond to your faith?
- B. How does Jesus model a life of trust in God according to Hebrews 12:3-4? How should His example encourage us?
- C. How often does God directly respond to your prayers? What may this indicate about your level of faith (Mt. 21:21-22)?
- D. What hinderances get in the way of us having the type of faith encouraged by Jesus?
- E. In the Bible, how has faith influenced the actions of those who have it? Be as specific as you can.