

STAND: ARMOR OF GOD | THE SHIELD OF FAITH

Key Text: Ephesians 6:16

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

BIG IDEA: Faith keeps trusting the character of God when the enemy attacks our confidence in God.

INTRO — TAKE UP THE SHIELD

There are some things you don't realize you need until the moment you need them.

You don't think much about an umbrella until the rain starts. You don't think much about a seatbelt until somebody slams on the brakes. You don't think much about insurance until something breaks. Or your spare tire until you get a flat.

And you probably don't think much about a shield... until something is flying at you. That's the image Paul gives us tonight.

Because one of the realities of following Jesus is that there will be moments when something comes flying at your faith. You're doing fine, and then suddenly a thought hits you. A fear hits you. An accusation hits you. A temptation hits you. Something happens that makes you question what you thought you knew about God.

- *Is God really with me?*
- *Can I actually trust him?*
- *If God loves me, why did he let this happen?*
- *What if this never changes?*
- *What if I really am what that voice keeps telling me I am?*

And sometimes those thoughts don't come slowly. They come like arrows.

That is why, when Paul describes the Christian life, he doesn't just tell us what to believe. He tells us what to **pick up when the arrows start flying**.

Ephesians 6:16: “In addition to all this, **take up the shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Notice Paul doesn't say, “*Hopefully you won't need it.*” He assumes you're going to need a shield. Because a shield only makes sense **if something is coming at you**.

And notice the verb Paul uses: “**take up**.” In the Greek, it's *analambanō* — it means to grab, to pick something up deliberately. There is intentionality here. Faith isn't merely a

feeling that arrives on its own. There are moments when you have to reach for what you know to be true and take hold of it again.

Paul is writing in a world where people understood what a shield was for. A Roman soldier's shield wasn't decorative. It was protection. When something was flying toward you, you put something between yourself and what was trying to hurt you.

And Paul says there is something like that in the Christian life: **faith**.

But this is where we have to be careful, because sometimes Christians talk about faith almost like positive thinking.

- *I have faith everything is going to work out.*
- *I have faith I'll get the job. I have faith the test will come back negative.*
- *I have faith God is going to fix this.*

Okay.

But what happens when it doesn't work out the way you wanted?

What happens when you don't get the job? What happens when the relationship doesn't get fixed? What happens when you pray and the answer isn't the answer you wanted?

Does that mean your shield didn't work? Does that mean you didn't have enough faith?

No. Because biblical faith is not confidence in a particular outcome.

Faith is confidence in the character of God.

Faith says, *I don't know what is going to happen next. I don't understand everything God is doing. I don't know when this is going to change. But I know who God is. Even here, God is trustworthy.*

1. FLAMING ARROWS WILL COME

Paul says the shield of faith can “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Not if there are arrows. There are arrows. Following Jesus does not mean you stop experiencing attacks against your faith. In fact, sometimes following Jesus means you become more aware that there is a battle happening.

The battle originates from the evil one. Paul doesn't just say there are flaming arrows flying around in the world. He says somebody is shooting them. There is an enemy.

And I know sometimes Christians can get weird about this. We can become fascinated with the devil, see a demon behind every inconvenience, blame Satan because we got a flat tire on the way to work. But the opposite mistake is pretending that evil is only an

idea, or a system, or something broken inside of us. Jesus didn't talk that way. Paul doesn't talk that way. Scripture says we have an adversary.

There is an evil one who opposes the work of God, who hates what God loves, and who would love nothing more than to destroy your confidence in God.

And notice, that's often how he works. The enemy doesn't have to convince you to become an atheist overnight. He just needs to get you to distrust God a little at a time. He wants you questioning God's goodness. Questioning God's Word. Questioning whether God really loves you. Questioning whether obedience is worth it. Questioning whether prayer actually matters.

Because if he can get you to distrust the character of God, eventually you'll start living as though God cannot be trusted.

That's why Peter says, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Jesus calls him a liar and the father of lies. Paul calls him the evil one. Different images, same reality: you have an enemy.

But here's what I also want you to notice: Paul doesn't say you should be terrified of him. He doesn't say obsess over him. He doesn't say spend your life trying to figure out whether every difficult thing that happens to you came from the devil.

He says, take up the shield.

Because the evil one may shoot the arrow, but he doesn't get to determine whether you believe the lie attached to it.

And not every arrow looks the same. Sometimes it's doubt: Did God really say that? Sometimes it's fear: What if God doesn't come through? Sometimes it's accusation: Look at what you've done. You really think God wants you? Sometimes it's temptation: You'd be happier if you just did this. Sometimes it's discouragement: Nothing is changing. Why keep trying? Sometimes it's shame: This is who you are. You'll always be this way.

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SHIELD ILLUSTRATION

[STAGE DIRECTION — not spoken: the live-arrows moment, pacing. A 'beat → arrow → pause' rhythm: let each arrow's sentence land before the next one flies. Brief the volunteers — this moment dies if it becomes comedy.]

This is where I want the arrows to start coming. I'm going to keep trying to preach, and these guys are going to start throwing them at me at moments I don't necessarily expect.

First arrow comes.

And actually, this is much closer to what spiritual attack feels like. You don't wake up Monday morning and get a notification on your phone: **"Spiritual attack scheduled today between 2:00 and 4:00 PM. Please have the armor of God ready."**

You're just living your life. You're driving. You're working. You're parenting. You're trying to follow Jesus. And suddenly an arrow comes: What if God isn't really with you?

Another arrow.

You keep going. What if this never gets better? What if your marriage doesn't change? What if your child doesn't come back? What if the prayer you've been praying doesn't get answered?

Another arrow.

Or maybe it's something from the past: Look at what you did. Remember that? You really think God can use you?

Another arrow.

And here's what I want us to understand. The enemy doesn't always need to destroy you with one massive attack. Sometimes he just wants you to **lower the shield**. He wants to wear down your confidence in God.

Because that's actually one of the oldest attacks in Scripture. Go all the way back to Genesis 3. What does the serpent ask Eve? **"Did God really say...?"** That's not just a question about God's command. Underneath it is a question about God's character. Can God actually be trusted? Maybe God is withholding something good from you. Maybe His boundaries aren't really for your good. Maybe you'll be happier if you take control yourself.

And I think we sometimes imagine spiritual warfare as the enemy whispering, Stop believing that God exists! But most Christians aren't going to fall for that tomorrow morning.

The arrows are usually more subtle. Stop believing God is good. Stop believing God is with you. Stop believing God can forgive you. Stop believing obedience is worth it. Stop believing prayer matters. Stop believing anything is ever going to change.

Those are flaming arrows! *When I taught on the belt of truth, we spoke about Genesis, and we return to it again tonight.*

Let me show you how old this attack is. Genesis 3:1–5 — the serpent asks Eve, ‘Did God really say...?’ Notice what he’s attacking. Not whether God exists — Eve knows God exists. He’s attacking God’s generosity. Maybe God’s holding out on you. Maybe His boundaries aren’t for your good. Satan didn’t ask Eve to stop believing in God; he asked her to stop believing God was good. Same arrow, four thousand years later.

Paul doesn't promise Christians that nobody is going to shoot at us. He tells us what to do when the arrows come: **Take up the shield!!**

2. FAITH REMEMBERS WHO GOD IS

So what does the shield actually do? **Faith remembers.**

When the arrow says, God has abandoned you, faith remembers, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” When the arrow says, God doesn't love you, faith remembers, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” When accusation says, You're condemned, faith remembers, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

And when fear says, You don't know what's going to happen, faith can actually say, **You're right. I don't.**

Because faith doesn't require me to pretend.

Faith doesn't mean nothing bad will happen. Faith doesn't mean I'm not afraid. Faith doesn't mean I understand why God allowed this. Faith doesn't mean everything will eventually turn out exactly how I want.

Faith says, **“Even here, God is trustworthy.”**

One of my favorite examples of this is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego standing before Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3. They're about to be thrown into a furnace, and they say, “The God we serve is able to deliver us from it.” I love that. **God is able.** They haven't lost confidence in God's power.

But then comes one of the greatest statements of faith in Scripture: **“But even if he does not...”** Even if He does not deliver us, we're still not going to bow.

That's mature faith. God can deliver me. I believe He can. I will pray for Him to deliver me. But my confidence in the goodness of God does not depend upon God giving me the outcome I want.

Hear Daniel 3:18 in their own words: 'But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods.' Even if He does not. Job said it too: 'Though he slay me, I will hope in him' (Job 13:15). Paul said it with his thorn: God's grace was sufficient, and the thorn stayed (2 Corinthians 12). **Sometimes faith says, 'God will.' But deeper faith says, 'Even if He doesn't.'**

I don't know what God will do. **But I know who God is.**

That's the shield.

3. FAITH IS STRENGTHENED IN COMMUNITY

There's another part of Paul's imagery that I think is really important. When we picture the armor of God, we usually imagine one Christian standing there alone dressed like a Roman soldier. But Roman soldiers weren't designed to fight as isolated individuals. Their shields were incredibly effective individually, but they became even more powerful when soldiers stood together.

One shield could stop an arrow. **A wall of shields could protect an army.**

And there's something profoundly Christian about that.

Because there are seasons when your faith feels strong. You're able to say, God is good. God is faithful. God is with me. I trust Him. ***But there are other seasons where you've been hit again and again. You're grieving. You're confused. You're disappointed. You're exhausted. And eventually that shield starts getting heavy.***

What happens then?

Somebody stands next to you.

The Romans called this formation the **testudo** — the **tortoise**. Soldiers locked their shields overhead and on the sides until they became a shell, nearly impervious to arrows. One shield stops an arrow; a wall of shields protects an army. That's why Paul says to 'bear one another's burdens' (Galatians 6:2). That's why Ecclesiastes says 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken.'

Sometimes I need you to believe with me. Sometimes I need you to remind me of something I already know but I'm having trouble believing right now. Sometimes I need you to pray when I don't know what to pray. Sometimes I need another believer to look at me and say, God hasn't abandoned you. God is still faithful. You're not alone. I'm standing here with you.

That's the Church!!!

There are battles **we were never intended to fight alone.**

And maybe somebody came tonight and that's exactly where you are. Your shield isn't gone. You haven't walked away from Jesus. You haven't stopped believing. **You're just tired of holding it.**

Maybe tonight God isn't saying, Try harder. Have more faith. Get yourself together.

Maybe He's saying, **Stop fighting alone.**

THE GOSPEL — OUR FAITH RESTS ON HIS FAITHFULNESS

And ultimately, this is where the whole thing lands. The Christian life isn't about how tightly I can hold onto God. It's about the God who holds onto me.

Our hope isn't ultimately in the **strength of our faith. Our hope is in the faithfulness of Jesus.**

Second Timothy 2:13 says it in one line: 'If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.' And Romans 8:31–39 takes every arrow on your list — who can condemn? who can separate? — and answers: nothing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Because my faith isn't always equally strong. Sometimes I pray with confidence. Sometimes I'm full of faith. And sometimes my prayer sounds a lot more like the father who came to Jesus and said, **"I believe; help my unbelief!"**

And Jesus didn't reject him.

I love that because **weak faith can still cling to a strong Savior.**

Ultimately, when the enemy attacks the character of God, we have somewhere to look. Look at Jesus. Look at the cross.

When the arrow says, God doesn't love you, look at the cross. When the arrow says, Your sin is too great, look at the cross. When accusation says, You're condemned, look at Jesus carrying your condemnation. When the arrow says, Death gets the final word, look at the empty tomb.

Our faith isn't wishful thinking that everything will turn out the way we want.

Our faith rests on a faithful Savior who has already shown us who God is.

RESPONSE — YOU DON'T HAVE TO HOLD THE SHIELD ALONE

So tonight I want to invite some people to respond. Maybe you've been taking arrows lately. Doubt. Fear. Accusation. Temptation. Discouragement. Shame. Maybe you're still standing, but you're tired. **Your shield feels heavy.**

We're not going to ask you to pretend you're stronger than you are. We're going to do what the people of God are supposed to do. **We're going to stand with you.**

If that's you tonight, I want to invite you to come forward. And as people come, I want some of our leaders and some of our brothers and sisters to gather around them. Pray for them. Remind them who God is. Hold faith with them.

Because maybe tonight you don't need somebody telling you, Have more faith.

Maybe you need somebody to stand beside you and say, **"Until you can hold the shield strongly again, I'll stand here with you."**

So here's the invitation, and it's for two groups. First — if you're under fire right now, come and stand in this area. Let believers gather around you, pray for you, hold faith with you.

Second — if you're not under attack tonight, take up the shield now, before the arrows come. Ephesians 6:13: 'having done all, to stand.' Don't wait for the battle to start picking up your armor. So come to this side and just kneel before the Lord and ask him to prepare you to stand when the arrows come.

Church, flaming arrows will come. Jesus never promised us otherwise. But when they come, **remember who God is. Take up the shield of faith. And when your arms get tired, don't stand alone.**

Even here, God is trustworthy. Amen.