

The Shield of Faith

Here's an opening contextual framework... How would you handle the following?

Ed Miller has been at his job for over 20 years, and his hard work has paid off with several promotions. Now his company has offered him a vice-president position. The only catch is that this promotion would require him to move his family across the country.

Ed and Ann are willing to move, but the obstacles are numerous. Their home will be paid off soon. Their oldest son, Jason, is attending college only two hours from their current home. Their daughter Reba – well, she's 16 and in love. She's already told her parents that it would "kill her" to move away from her boyfriend.

On the other hand, the Millers' pastor has a young energetic friend who just planted a church in the area where the Millers would be moving. He would love to have the Millers' leadership skills. And he might connect with Al, the Millers' younger son, who still lives at home but does not attend church. Also, maybe Ed and Ann would have opportunities to share their faith in a more unchurched area.

What would you advise the Millers to do as they face this faith challenge? How might the Enemy want to lead – or rather, mislead – them? How might he attack their faith?

Let's explore the issue of faith!

We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), and with faith we stand against the Enemy.

Reviewing Components of God's Armor

Belt of Truth

- Know Jesus.
- Know His Word.
- Live the Word.

Breastplate of Righteousness

- Live like Jesus.
- Make right choices.
- Resist temptation.

Peace-Cleats

- Stand ready in faith.
- Be at peace with God.
- Be at peace with others.
- Share your faith.

PREVIEW: (F. A. I. T. H.)

F. *Foundational Faith*

A. *Assertive Faith*

I. *Inspirational Faith*

T. *Testing of Faith*

H. *Help with Faith*

T/S: start with 3 key ingredients...

Glue **2 Timothy 3:16-17 & John 10:35**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God **Genesis 1:1 & John 1:1ff**

Gospel **John 3:16 & Ephesians 2:8-10**

*For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **9not** as a result **of works**, so that no one may boast.*

10*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

We are saved by grace through faith...

and with faith we stand against the Enemy.

Preview of Session:

A. Foundation: KNOWING WHAT FAITH IS...

1. God teaches us what faith is...
2. God gives us His “shield of faith”
3. God’s gift of faith is a great defense...

B. Assertive: LIVING ON OFFENSIVE FAITH

1. We have not been called/created to be a “fortress”
2. Faith is an “action” word
3. Faith follows the Lord’s leading “no matter what!”

C. Inspiration: FAITH BY EXAMPLE

1. Abraham’s example
2. Father of ailing child
3. Our example to others

D. Tests: UNDERSTANDING ATTACKS ON FAITH

1. Attacks thru “worry”
2. Attacks thru “fear” & “doubt”

E. Help: INCREASING YOUR FAITH

1. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God
2. Faith comes by trusting the Word of God
3. Faith comes by living the Word of God

I. KNOWING WHAT FAITH IS

God Teaches Us What Faith Is

Hebrews 11:1 provides a simple definition of faith:

*“Faith is the reality of what is hoped for,
the proof of what is not seen.”*

Notice how odd it is. Proof for us is usually in seeing (“seeing is believing”); but faith is the proof of what we have not seen.

**Faith isn’t just someone’s opinion or an emotion
or unrealistic hope...**

***“Faith is a solid conviction resting on
God’s words that makes the future
present and the invisible seen.”***

- We can’t see God, but we still believe He exists because His Word affirms His existence (**Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:6**).
- We didn’t see God create the world, but we still believe that He did (**Gen. 1-2**).
- We haven’t seen heaven, but we believe in its reality because the Word teaches about it (**Rev. 21:1-27**).

- We can't see God's presence around us, but we believe that He won't leave us or forsake us (**Heb. 13:5**).
- We haven't been physically with Jesus, yet we believe with certainty that we will be in the future (**John 14:1-3**).
- We don't know what tomorrow holds for us, but we know that God controls whatever tomorrow brings (**Luke 12:13-21**).

Genuine faith gives substance to our hope and reality to the unseen. When we believe in God even when we can't see Him, trust Him even when we can't feel Him, and follow Him even when we aren't where He's leading, we're learning to live by faith. **That kind of faith stands against the Enemy.**

“I know the plans I have for you”—this is the LORD's declaration—‘plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’” - Jeremiah 29:11

God Gives Us the Shield of Faith

The word translated “**shield**” in Ephesians 6:16 referred to a **large, door-shaped, 4' x 2.5'** wooden shield covered with leather, intended to protect the Roman soldier's entire body.

The following verses briefly describe a shield.

- Genesis 15:1 - Psalm 5:12 - Psalm 18:2 - Proverbs 30:5.

In each of these verses, God is the shield and the refuge. He goes before us, watches over us, and protects us in times of trouble.

God gives us the faith that protects us. Don't forget—all of the armor is His, and He allows us to wear it in battle. He gives us faith and grows our faith when we hear and follow His Word (Rom. 10:17).

He who gives us faith to believe in Jesus also grants us faith to protect us against the Devil's arrows.

In no case does God leave us alone
to fight the Enemy.

God's Gift of Faith Is a Good Defense

In the ancient world, enemies often shot arrows they tipped with pitch and then set on fire before releasing. The best prepared soldiers carried shields with water-soaked leather coverings.

The Enemy's forces are much more powerful than we are,
yet those who are "strengthened by the Lord" (**Eph. 6:10**)
can resist and overcome his attacks.

One way to overcome the Enemy's attacks involves countering him with the Word of God.

We can stand on God's Word when under assault.

**We stand defensively against the Devil by knowing
and believing the Word of God.**

When discouraged, we can trust God and not become dismayed (Joshua 1:9). He has already given us a way to win when we are tempted (1 Cor. 10:13), and He has taught us how to recognize false teaching (1 John 4:1). Even if we were to face attacks of persecution, God has taught us how to respond then, too (Matthew 10:28-31). Doubts are resolved when we trust God to show us His way (Proverbs 3:5-6). In any of these cases, we stand defensively by knowing and believing God's Word.

Think about how the Enemy attacks you.
Read and meditate on the verses above. Consider memorizing them to stand defensively against the Enemy's arrows aimed at you.

God is fulfilling His plan, and Paul understood his personal responsibility to proclaim (and shed light on) the gospel.

We have the same responsibility.

- Ask God to keep you humble as you serve Him.
- If you are at odds with someone in your church, seek forgiveness and unity.

*“I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord,
urge you to walk worthy
of the calling you have received.”*

- Ephesians 4:1

II. LIVING ON OFFENSIVE FAITH

Carrying the shield of faith is BOTH an *offensive & defensive* strategy.

We Are Not Called to be Fortresses

Each expression of the Great Commission in the New Testament (see below*) requires us to move out into the world with the gospel.

A church standing-still can't be obedient to the Great Commission because it's certainly no threat to the Enemy.

*I fear some churches have become fortresses.
Their members never go out into the community.*

**Such churches see lost, unchurched people as the opposition.
They are driven more by defensively protecting their turf
than by offensively fulfilling the Great Commission.**

*

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

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“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.”

Mark 16:15

*

“This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Luke 24:46-47

*

“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

John 20:21

*

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

The problem with becoming a “fortress” is (*disobedience... because*) the Ephesians 6 passage has a clear offensive element.

...Ephesians ch. 6 contains clear battle imagery.

***Sometimes our best defensive “stand”
against the Enemy comes when we press forward
in offensive obedience.***

(see Ephesians 6:11, 13-14)

How would you rate YOUR “fortress mentality”

1

I/we are completely
a fortress

2

I/we see others,
but don't actively
pursue them

3

I/we, the body,
are not a fortress

4

5

I/we plan for
and welcome
outsiders.

Faith Is an Action Word

Hebrews 11 is known as the “**Hall of Fame of Faith**” because it lists biblical characters who lived “by faith.”

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain (v. 4).

By faith Noah ... in reverence built an ark to deliver his family (v. 7).

By faith Abraham ... obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance (v.8).

By faith Moses ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and chose to suffer with the people of God (vv. 24-25).

By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn’t perish with those who disobeyed (v. 31).

All of these biblical models of faith gave evidence of carrying their shields of faith by their actions. See in their associated verses words like *offered, built, obeyed, went, refused, chose, and received*—all action words.

The Lesson of Hebrews 11

***Bold confidence in God gives rise to bold initiatives,
through which biblical believers do whatever
God requires of them.***

Such faith deflects the Enemy’s arrows
even as we march forward.

Faith actions don’t come easily.

Look again at some of the stories of Hebrews 11 (*especially the second half*).

God required Noah to preach coming judgment, and only (some) his family listened to him (v.7).

Moses' obedience included rejecting the pleasures & privileges of Egyptian royalty in order to identify with his people (vv. 23-27).

Some heroes of the faith ***“were stoned...sawed in two...died by the sword...wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated”*** (vv. 33,37).

Sometimes victory comes only when we carry the shield to our death.

Offensive Faith Follows God Wherever He Directs

Abraham followed God to unknown lands; Moses left Egypt to go to a desert

Faith on the offensive means faith willing to go wherever God asks, regardless of cost.

“Offensive faith is ‘No-matter-what!’ faith.” - JDP

What does it / will it take to be willing to do whatever God asks us to do in His church?

Because God fulfilled His purpose in Christ,
we now have “*boldness, access, and confidence through faith in Him*”.

No other powers are capable of nullifying God’s plan.

We can trust that God is working out His plan,
even when it includes suffering.

*We shouldn’t become discouraged when we undergo
turmoil. God has a plan to use that suffering too.*

If you ever question God’s purposes in a challenging circumstance,
pray and ask Him to give you confidence in His eternal plans.

III. FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF OTHERS

I am always challenged by faith that says, “*I will do whatever God asks, and
I will pay whatever the cost.*”

The Bible is filled with *models of faith* whose lives
encourage us, strengthen us, and challenge us.

Abraham Modeled Faith Through the Unknown

Read about Abraham's call to faith in Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham paid a heavy price.

God told Abraham to leave his native land, his relatives, and his father's house to find a land that God would show him.

Surely this choice wasn't easy.

Hebrews says Abraham started his journey...

“not knowing where he was going.”

Just imagine some of the practical questions he faced:

- *How did he know what to pack?*
- *How did he explain to his wife where they were going?*
- *How did he explain to relatives why he was leaving?*
- *How did he know which direction to go?*
- *How would he know when he finally arrived in the land?*

If you were Abraham, how do you think you would have reacted?

Abraham simply obeyed!

Abraham stepped out into the unknown.

Doesn't that sound like the definition of faith?

The security of God's promises meant more to Abraham than the security of his homeland.

Does your shield of faith give you that kind of security?

On a scale of 1-5

indicate your willingness to trust God with these unknowns

- _____ 1. God calls you to leave your job because your boss is immoral—but you have no new job.
- _____ 2. God calls you to move your family so you can attend seminary in preparation for missionary service.
- _____ 3. God calls you to leave your church to help plant a new one in a growing part of town.
- _____ 4. God calls you to move to an inner-city area and develop a ministry for people who live there.
- _____ 5. God calls you to take out a second mortgage to give to your church's building fund.

A Grieving Father Modeled an Honest Faith

Some might question whether he is an example to follow. He is the father of a demon-possessed boy. **Read** his story in **Mark 9:14-27**.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, the father said to him, ***“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us”***. (v. 22). Jesus quickly countered: “If You can?” Everything is possible to the one who believes” (v.23).

Jesus reminded the father that the question was not whether He could heal the boy, but whether or not the man had faith.

The father’s honest response...

“I do believe! Help my unbelief!”

The father knew that he had confidence in Jesus, but he also knew that his confidence reflected an imperfect faith. He needed Jesus’ help to keep his faith current. If Jesus didn’t replenish his faith *every second*, the father knew his faith would be eroded by the circumstances of life.

In response, Jesus commanded the demon to leave the boy (v. 25).

Here’s the point:

We don’t simply take up the shield of faith one day and expect it to protect us from that point forward.

We can’t fight today’s battles on the basis of yesterday’s power.

*Carrying the shield means moment-by-moment
trusting God and His Word.*

Carrying the shield of faith also means daily reading & living His Word.

Carrying the shield of faith sometimes means acting in faith even when we must cry out with childlike honesty, **“Help me, God!”**

*Faith admits the struggle and then wins the battle
by turning humbly to God.*

Faith says, “I will do what God has called me to do, even when it makes no sense to me or frightens me.”

God not only gives us the shield of faith but also gives us the strength to pick it up.

Where is your faith struggling?

What has God called YOU to do that frightens you?

A Challenge: Who's Watching You?

Three great “heart questions” for the professing Christian:

1. If your children or grandchildren duplicated your daily walk with God, would you feel blessed or horrified?
2. Because of your model, would they be willing to take a risk for God?
3. How will God use your answers to questions 1 & 2 for His glory?

READ Ephesians 3:14-19 closely & prayerfully...

NOTE: Paul's prayer didn't focus on the superficial things of this world for which we so often pray.

Rather, he began by asking God to grant these believers “power” in the inner man – power that was undoubtedly needed when living in the pagan region around Ephesus.

The Holy Spirit gives that strength and power through His indwelling.

Second, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would comprehend the love of God. This prayer may be one of the more powerful intercessory prayers in all of Scripture.

Think about ***the breadth and width, height and depth: of God's love for you (Eph. 3:18).***

IV. UNDERSTANDING ATTACKS ON FAITH

The Devil attacks believers today, seemingly out of nowhere.

Subtly, he undercuts our faith and challenges our trust in God...
and we don't always recognize his attacks.

We need to learn to recognize
different ways the Enemy attacks our faith.

When we know Satan's schemes, we are better prepared
to use the shield of faith more effectively.

The Enemy Attacks Faith Through Worry

Read Matthew 6:25-34 & circle any words/phrases that challenge us not to worry.

This is why I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky; they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying? Any why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon is all his splendor was adorned like one of these! If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't He do much more for you—you of little faith? So don't worry saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus said that the Father will take care of His children.

So what is the point of worrying?

Yet sometimes we are consumed by the very worry Jesus spoke directly against.

Our worrying is exactly what the Enemy wants.

Notice how Satan subtly attacks:

- He wants us to focus more on temporary— vs. on eternal—things (v. 25)
- He wants us to think that worry will somehow make a difference (v. 27).
- He wants us to think that somehow God Himself doesn't know what we need (v. 32).
- He wants us to be consumed with the possibilities that have not yet happened (v. 34).
- He wants us to be worried about tomorrow (v. 34).

Are you worrying about things that won't matter in eternity?

Is you worry adding one moment to your life or might it be shortening you life?

Where do you believe God is when you're worried?

Worry, by definition, is a lack of faith in God.

(a.k.a. "**practical atheism**")

In fact... *worry quickly becomes idolatry of the self.*

When we are at such a point, we are NOT carrying the shield of faith.

If worry is a problem for you, ask God to help you to trust Him.

The Enemy stakes his battle plan on your worry.

He will rob you of faith and cause you to fall victim to him.

**Take up the shield of faith and stand against this scheme
of the Enemy in you life.**

Worry

vs.

Faith

**Focuses on circumstances and self
obsesses about what might
happen based on our thoughts**

**focuses on God trusts what
God has and will do based
on God's word**

**elevates the temporary over the
eternal keeps us awake at night**

**sees the eternal despite the
temporary gives us sleep at night**

is a tool of the Enemy

is a gift of God

The Enemy Attacks Faith Through Fear & Doubt

Peter walked on the water toward Jesus (v.29)...
until he sensed the strength of the wind.

Gripped by fear, Peter began to sink (v. 30).

Jesus questioned him about his little faith (v. 31).

*Quickly, Peter changed from a man of faith walking on water to a man of **doubt sinking** in the sea.*

“Doubt” in Mathew 14:31 implies the idea of *one person trying to go in two different directions at once.*

The same idea appears in James 1:6... where James teaches that those who pray must do so believing and not doubting. The picture is not of one who in one moment he prays, and in the next moment he completely doubts.

***The same thing happens to us that happened to Peter...
we focus more on our circumstances...
than on the God who is bigger than our circumstances!***

For too long, the Enemy won in my life through fear and doubt.

I can only wonder how much joy and peace I lost while I doubted and feared, choosing not to take up the shield of faith.

Think about a situation in your life when fear or doubt harmed your relationship with God.

What did that teach you?

Trust that God is strong enough to help you overcome anything you face.

V. INCREASING OUR FAITH

I haven't found a shortcut to learning...

The same can be said about building faith. The Enemy fights against the process too much for it to be that easy.

In the midst of this spiritual battle/reality, we need to learn how to take up the shield of faith.

Keep in mind that this task is not intended to be easy.

Faith Comes by Hearing the Word of God

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”
(Romans 10:17)

FIRST:

Faith is not separated from hearing the Word of God.

In some way,
God awakens our hearts
and makes our faith possible
when we hear the Word.

SECOND:

*The Gospel (literally “good news”) about Christ,
proclaimed by His messengers,
leads us to faith.*

The **process is circular**;
we hear God’s Word,
and He produces faith in us
so that we might respond in faith
to the Word that we have heard.

“How can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher?” - Romans 10:14.

**Faith doesn’t happen...
apart from the hearing of God’s Word.**

Faith Comes by Trusting the Word

The following verses direct/inspire us to trust God.

- **Genesis 15:1**
- **Deuteronomy 20:1**
- **Joshua 1:9**
- **Isaiah 41:10**
- **Jeremiah 46:27**
- **Luke 2:10**
- **Hebrews 13:6**

The verses all include some version of the most common command in the Scriptures: ***“Fear not!”*** or ***“Do not be afraid!”***

In most cases, the ***“Fear not!”*** command is accompanied by this ***miraculous promise*** that alleviates our fears: ***“I am with you.”***

Remember, the Enemy undercuts our faith by fear and worry—but God reminds us again and again that He is with us.

Our faith grows when...
we trust that no one’s strength can overtake His strength.

Faith Comes by Living the Word

Typically we cry out for more faith when we’re facing a situation beyond our control—when ***we realize that we need God’s help.***

Sometimes desperation graciously turns us to God & His Word.

More heart-questions for the professing believer:

Do I live by faith even when life is going smoothly?

Do I for example...

- *trust Him enough to tithe?*
- *trust Him to take the risk of telling my neighbor about Him?*
- *believe in His power enough to turn from my habitual sins?*
- *have the confidence in Him that I need to teach a Bible study?*
- *believe in the power of His Word enough to read it every day?*
- *so trust His existence that I speak to Him daily through prayer?*

Why should God trust us with more faith when we are not faithful to the Word that He has already given us?

God will increase our faith only when we obediently follow what we already know of His Word.

Important Closing Observations:

The pieces of the armor can't be separated from each other.

They come as a package deal.

*When we live by faith we are equipped and deployed
for spiritual warfare.*

Consider the following faith/armor connections:

- Wearing the belt of truth means knowing & living God's Word
- Wearing the breastplate of righteousness also requires knowing & living God's Word, which reveals God's truth on righteousness...
- We experience God's peace only when we both know Him and follow Him faithfully.
- When we know God's peace, we stand firmly and march forward to tell others about Him.
- Standing firmly and marching forward demand that we carry the shield of faith.
- Carrying the shield of faith requires hearing, knowing, believing, and living God's Word (**Rom. 10:17**).

Finally, the theme of "walking" is important throughout *Ephesians 4-6*.

- Pray Ephesians 4:1... *"Lord, help me to walk worthy of my calling."*

***What are you & your church doing that is so
"God-sized" that the Enemy has taken notice?***