

Rules of Engagement
THE SHIELD OF FAITH
Small Group Questions

Opening: When did you become a Christian? Describe the major influences that led you to faith in Christ.

1. Satan's strategy is to strike fear in us. Do you have any phobias? Or, could you list of couple of things that create fear in you?

2. Read 2 Timothy 1:6-8

How does fear disrupt the power in your life?

How does fear disrupt love in your life?

How does fear disrupt self-control (or a sound mind) in your life?

3. The object of our faith is Jesus. How have you been able to accept the truth claims of Christianity?

Are there any aspects of the faith that you struggle with?

How would you help someone who doubts the veracity of Christianity?

4. The objective of our faith is obedience. "The essence of faith is acting as if God is telling the truth." What does that statement mean to you?

5. In what areas of your life are you particularly challenged to obey God even when it doesn't make sense?

6. Three rules of engaging the spiritual battle when it comes to fear is

Confess the Fear

Claim the Promise

Cultivate the Relationship

What do each of these three steps mean?

Which one is most difficult for you to follow?

7. What scripture passages could you use to encourage a believer to trust God and conquer their fear?

8. What is the most important and practical principle you learned from this teaching on the Shield of Faith?

Ephesians 6:10-16, (P. 979)

We've been talking for the last several weeks about spiritual warfare. It is real and it is pervasive. The Bible tells us that he has already been defeated at the cross. So, we don't need to be paranoid, but we do need to be prepared. That's the point of Paul's passage in Ephesians 6. Today we are on the fourth piece of armor.

Ephesians 6:10-16, (P. 979)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

The Belt of Truth

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The Shoes of Peace

The Shield of Faith

You've got all this equipment on. But they are all defensive in nature. And so, without a shield, you're completely exposed. The Greek word for shield in this verse is *thureon*, which describes a particular Roman shield, about 2 and half feet wide and four feet high. You've probably seen them in movies. 2 1/2 by 4 feet - large enough to protect the vital parts of your body. What's more, it's tall enough that when you had too, you could set the shield on the ground and crouch behind it. And when you set the shield side by side, the army could create a virtual wall of protection. Paul says this shield is able to quench fiery darts. In those days it was common to dip arrows into tar or some flammable substance and literally launch flaming arrows. Thus, the shields would often be covered with leather, or often kept wet in order to extinguish the flames. The Bible tells us to be aware of the devil's schemes. It's interesting, as we're working our way through this passage to learn about how the various pieces of armor speak to the particular schemes Satan uses to defeat us or torment us. The Belt of Truth protects you from deception. The Breastplate of Righteousness protects your from accusation. The Shoes of Peace protect you from divisiveness. Paul says to take up the shield of faith. Question: What do you do with a shield? You stand behind it. It's a piece of protection to stand behind. You can set it down and hide behind it, be completely covered. The fiery darts Satan throws at us could be anything and everything. I don't think Paul had any particular attack in mind. But this morning I want you to get the picture of a soldier crouching down behind his shield, or even standing there with the shield up over him to protect him. You hide behind a shield. And why would you hide?

Satan's Arsenal: FEAR

One of the most predominant emotional struggles addressed in the Bible is fear. Both Old and New Testaments are filled with stories of fear. We are afraid of many things.

A little boy who didn't want to participate in the school production and was finally convinced to memorize two simple lines, all you have to say is two lines. "It is I, be not afraid." He thought he could do it, but when the time came he stepped out on stage and said: it's me and I'm scared.

2 Timothy 1:6-8 (P. 995)

Paul's letter to Ephesians was written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to lead the church there. Paul's second letter to Timothy came during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome. And Paul was pretty sure he wasn't going to get out of this one alive. And in fact he didn't. This might have been the last thing Paul ever wrote before he was martyred for the faith. It was a tense time and Paul writes to his disciple these words:

⁶ For this reason

Paul had just mentioned Timothy's sincerity and spiritual heritage, the things that have brought Timothy to this place and time.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

Paul had discipled Timothy. He had commissioned him for ministry. He had assigned him to lead the Ephesian church. And then he says this:

⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear

Why was Timothy afraid? Paul doesn't specify, but Timothy was a Senior Pastor, so that makes sense to me. More importantly Nero was on a rampage and Rome didn't think too kindly about Christians at the moment. If they come for Paul, who will they turn to next. But Paul reminds Timothy,

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

(some translations read, and a sound mind)

When you are filled with fear you feel weak, and incapacitated. When you are filled with fear you are self-absorbed and insensitive to anyone else around you. When you are filled with fear you are irrational and unpredictable. Fear robs you of power, love and a sound mind or self-control. Paul says: take up the shield of faith. That's why he moves on in verse 8,

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

The Believer's Armor:

Paul says, take up the shield. We'll stop there for a moment and just think about the shield. You have at the front of the cab in your car a wind'shield.' If you've ever had a rock hit it you know how important it is to have one.

Psalms 84:11 says that the Lord God is our shield.

Proverbs 30:5 says He is a shield to those who trust him.

We've used this reference every week

Romans 13:14 (ESV)

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul says, take up Jesus like a shield and stand behind Him. There is both an object and an objective to the shield of faith. The object is Jesus.

1. THE OBJECT OF FAITH: JESUS

1 John 4 (P.1023)

Someone defined fear as an acoustic: False Evidence Appearing Real. Satan is a liar, so he presents false evidence all the time. But we have a God who gives us reasons to believe. Let's look at several verses.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith is only as good as the object in which faith is placed. You can believe anything you want. The question is: does the object of your faith have the power to deliver what it promises? Is it rational and credible?

1 John 4:14 ESV

and we have seen and testify that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world.

John wrote so that we would know stuff. Not just believe it, but to know it. He writes to us to give us evidence. Faith is not taking a leap in the dark, it's not checking your brain at the door. The historical evidence of Jesus is overwhelming. You hear stories all the time about people setting out to disprove the historical claims of the gospel only to find themselves surrendering to the truth they discovered.

1 John 5:11

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

John uses the word testimony 15 times in his gospel. Christianity is a faith system based on historical evidence. Not only, the written record, the Bible is filled with stories of a God who is active in the lives of men and faithful to His promises.

1 John 5:4

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Do you remember the twelve spies sent into the land of Promise? 10 were bad and two were good. All twelve went in with the same experience, but they didn't come out with the same perspective. 10 men said they couldn't. 2 men said they could. Why? Because ten men saw giants compared to themselves. Two men saw giants compared to their God. 10 men had fear. Two men had faith.

I'll give a hundred dollars to anyone in this room who knows, without looking it up, who knows the names of those ten men. Nobody knows them. Fearful people never leave a legacy. How many of you know the two men in that story?

2. THE OBJECTIVE OF FAITH: OBEDIENCE

Faith must have an objective standard by which it is defined. Otherwise you're acting on a falsehood or a fantasy. For us our standard is the Jesus. But faith is not faith unless we operate in the realm of that standard. Tony Evans describes it this way: faith is acting as if something were so even when it appears not to be so in order that it might be shown to be so simply because God said so. The essence of faith is acting as if God is telling the truth. Faith is obedience. It's a function of the mind that shows up in the feet. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 2 tells us that because of faith people of old, talking about men and women, whose faith showed up in their feet, were commended by God. And the Hebrews starts listing the names: By faith Abraham. By faith Moses. By faith David and on and on the list goes. They knew in their mind, what their eyes couldn't see. Paul says we walk by faith, not by sight.

So when Satan wants to deceive you, you cling to God's truth. When Satan wants to accuse you, you cling to Christ's righteousness. When Satan wants to separate you from God's love, you remind yourself that Christ tore down the dividing wall of hostility. And when Satan wants to induce fear in your life you choose to operate in the realm of what true -

1 John 5:4

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1 John 4:4

he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

When you choose fear you're saying that God can't be trusted and you're giving Satan a foothold in your life.

The Rules of Engagement:

Colossians 2:15 says that Jesus has already disarmed the rulers and authorities. The victory is won. We are already seated in Christ, in the heavenlies. We just need to live as if that were true. Satan has no power over you. So, with the shield of faith firmly planted in front of you, with those fiery darts aimed straight at you, what are you to do? Let me give you three principles for conquering your fear.

1. CONFESS THE FEAR

What are you afraid of? Your financial stability. Your health. The state of your marriage. The safety of your children. The Bible is a book of reality. It doesn't hide the fact that there were many people who loved God, devoted to God, did their best to honor God but they often succumbed to fear; the same people listed in Hebrews 11, Abraham, Moses, David. In the New Testament: everyone of the disciples. You are not alone. So don't hide it or deny it. Don't try to compensate for it or conquer it on your own. Sometimes fear is the root of other emotional difficulties. If you're struggling with anger or depression, a lot of times it's because you are fearful or worried about something else. We've all been there, so if you're afraid: you're in good company. That's not meant to condone your fear, it's meant to connect with your fear. You must remember: Satan wants you hide in your fear. God wants you to hide in the shelter of His wings.

Psalm 34:4 (NIV)

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.**

Don't let Satan win the battle of fear. You can't avoid fearful situations. That's life in the spiritual battle, but you can avoid fear in those situations when the object of your faith is stronger than the object of your fear. Satan is no match for God. Your faith is in the one who said, "take heart, or in other words, have faith, I have overcome the world. Which leads to step two:

2. CLAIM THE PROMISE

I haven't taken the time to count them and it would depend on the translation you use, but it's been suggested that the phrase, "fear not" is recorded 365 times in the Bible, one for every day of the year. And some of us need to hear it more than once during our day. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. James 2:17 says that faith without works is dead. So, the faith that pleases God is the faith that obeys God.

Faith is acting as if God is telling the truth. So, what's the truth?

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Psalms 118:6 (NIV)

**The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?**

Proverbs 3:25-26 (NIV)

**Have no fear of sudden disaster
or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,
²⁶ for the LORD will be at your side
and will keep your foot from being snared.**

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

**So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)

**Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.**

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Taking up the shield of faith is synonymous with obeying the Word of God. Claim His promise and live as if His Word is true.

3. CULTIVATE THE RELATIONSHIP

Twenty years ago we lived about fifty yards from this train track that runs along our property. Katie was three years old at the time. It's interesting what will wake a parent in the middle of the night. The oncoming train was something I got used to. What woke me up was the thump of those two little feet hopping out of bed and running to ours. She didn't like the train, especially when she was in her own room alone. And so she would crawl into our bed and we would love on her into the noise was over. And when she was sufficiently comforted, she went back to bed. Some of us are afraid of being alone. Most of us are more afraid when we're alone. God never meant for us to be alone.

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

How many times have you ever said to someone, do it with me. I'll go if you'll go. I'll sign up if you'll sign up. You needed the connection of someone who knows you and loves, when you know you're not alone. If you could understand how much God loves you, you wouldn't be so afraid. Because the degree to which you live in fear is an indication that you have not realized the love of God in your heart. Here's what to do: You take that shield of faith and you hide. God is not opposed to you hiding. But He doesn't want you to hide from Him. He wants you to hide in Him.

What Must I Do to Stand Firm?

Remember the one who loves you and be different because of it.