



Armor
Part 5 – Shield of Faith
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I'm excited to be a part of this series called *Armor*, because in these crazy times in which we live, we all need to be equipped for how to navigate life. So, this morning, we're going to look at just one simple verse and we're going to look at one piece of armor.

If you have your Bible, you can open it to Ephesians 6 or you can follow along up here on the screen. You read up here in Verse 16 of Ephesians 6 where Paul says, ***16 In addition to all this...*** So, some of the armor he's already talked about. ***...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.***

So one of the pieces of armor that Paul encourages us to arm ourselves with is the shield of faith. Now I'm not sure what image just came to your mind, but before we get into the meaning of the verse, I want to help you actually get an accurate picture of the painting that Paul is trying to paint for us in this verse.

When I hear the word *shield*, my mind goes immediately to old movies like *Spartacus* or something where there is a guy who has a sword in one hand, a shield in the other to deflect the blows of the sword of the guy that he's fighting. That's not the word that is used here. The word used here is *therion* (sp?). It's not a shield that you would hold with one arm on your forearm, it's rather a big plank about 4ft high, 2 1/2 feet wide, very heavy, often covered with either leather or metal, but it was a shield by which a soldier could crouch behind and they would find total protection. No part of them would be exposed. So, when you hear the word *shield*, I want you to think of this big plank.

And then it's the shield of faith. We're going to unpack what that means, but it's the word *pisteuo* (sp?) and it basically means belief or trust. So, in October of 2021, in a world that is becoming increasingly unraveled, what does it mean to take up your shield of faith? What does it look like on a Tuesday? What does it look like when you are interacting with people on the job? What does it look like when you face one of life's unexpected curve balls?

Now I don't know about you, but when I hear this concept, I have to be honest, there is a bit of a tension in me because I've been a follower of Jesus for a long time. In fact, I've been a Christ follower for half a century, 50 years. It feels kind of surreal to even say that. But I also have to be honest to tell you that sometimes I have doubts and big questions for God, and confusion about what he's up to.

I like having my life in order and being in control. My wife would tell you I have control issues. I like to think of it as I like to have a plan, but she would say I have control issues. I don't like it when I don't have control and when I don't have control, I can become anxious. Maybe some of you are the same way.

It makes me think of a story that happens in Mark 9, where there is a story of a distraught father. His son is possessed by an evil spirit and this evil spirit has so oppressed this young boy that he can't even talk. Sometimes the evil spirit would throw the boy on the ground, and he would violently convulse. This distraught father comes to Jesus and says, "I asked your disciples to cast out this evil spirit, but they couldn't do it, so would you have mercy on us? And then he uses these words: "Help us if you can." Jesus quickly responds, "What do you mean if I can? Any thing is possible if a person believes." And then this father, out of the depth of his anguish, utters these words: "I believe, I want to believe, I'm trying to believe, but help me in my unbelief."

I feel that tension. When I face circumstances and situations in life where it's like, "Hey I love God, I want to believe, I want to trust," but then there are also pieces of me that doubt and sometimes I don't believe and sometimes my fear takes over and I want to overcome. In a moment like we're living in right now, where it seems like things are coming apart at the seams, our humanity is racked with fear and doubt and a lot of uncertainty, and it collides with our faith, with what we say we believe, with the hope and the promise that we have in God that he is good and in control, and there is this dualling tension in our souls. We come into a place like this on a Sunday morning and we sing songs of worship, and we declare our trust in God. And then we walk out and, as we face the week, there is this pit in our stomach about what we are about to walk into. And our bold declaration of trust can be followed very quickly by paralyzing anxiety.

So, here's the question I want us all to wrestle with this morning: **How do you grow your faith to trust in God no matter what life throws at you?** That's what I think it means to pick up the shield of faith. How do you equip yourself with the shield of faith? I want to give you three really simple, not easy, but simple challenges right out of this passage.

1. Recognize that the shield of faith that you have been given is an amazing gift. I want to spend some time unpacking that. Here's the deal. You don't have to create it. You don't have to manufacture it. You don't have to fashion it. You don't have to get in a workshop and create it. It is a gift that God has given to you. So, you've been given this gift and now God says, "I want you to pick it up because you're going to need it in the battle of life," and especially in October of 2021, you better know what it looks like to pick up the shield of faith.

Now this word *faith* has two different nuances and both of them come into play in this passage. So, the first one is that faith is an objective faith; it's a noun, it's the doctrine that we believe, it's the belief system by which you are ordering your life.

Sometimes we'll talk that we belong to the Christian faith. There is a certain set of beliefs and a belief system that defines who we are. In the little book at the very end of the New Testament, Jude calls on these first century believers to defend the faith, the noun, that God has entrusted to his people once for

all time. It's the doctrine that you hold. And we all hold a doctrinal position, a theological view about life, about the Word of God, about what God is like, how he works in the world. Sometimes, we'll use a phrase about having a Christian worldview. That's what we're talking about here. Again, we have a reasonable faith. We have a faith where you don't have to check your brains at the door in order to believe in Christianity. And in a day when our Christian values and philosophies are being challenged more than ever, we better have convictions, not just opinions, right? Convictions about we know what we know that we believe and we're standing on that no matter what the culture tells us.

Now the faith that you and I hold is really rooted in two realities. It's rooted in the character of God. One of the foundational conditions of our belief system is that God exists and that he has a certain kind of character. We read about his character in scripture that he is sovereign, he is in control, that God is righteous, that he is trustworthy, that he is perfect, that he never changes, that he is loving and that he is good. So, this faith that we hold onto called Christianity is rooted first in that God exists and he has undeniable character.

Some people, though, because of their pain, because of the circumstances in the world, have decided to give God a makeover. They can't reconcile the pain in their world and the pain they are experiencing with the God of the Bible, so they give God a makeover. A great case study in this is Rabbi Harold Kushner, whose son had a very rare disease called Progeria. His son eventually died of the disease and Kushner wrote a very popular book many years ago called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It was the journey of him as a Jewish Rabbi trying to reconcile his faith with a world that seemed out of control. In fact, Kushner's conclusion is that even God has a hard time keeping chaos in check. He writes God is a God of justice, but not of powers. Millions of readers found some comfort in Kushner's portrayal of a God who seems compassionate even though weak and not in control.

Ellie Wiesel who is a survivor of the Holocaust and a Jew said of the God described by Kushner, "If that's who God is, why doesn't he resign and let someone more competent take his place."

See, this is about your worldview and about your understanding of God and faith. I don't know about you, but there isn't much comfort for me in a God who is nice but powerless, kind, but impotent. Nor does that view really reflect the view of the Bible. The very essence of what it means to be God is that he has absolute power and control and sovereignty.

So, the place to start is to go back to what we know to be true. And it's important for you to have your own faith and belief system that you have wrestled with and worked through and that you come to this unshakeable reality that God is sovereign and that he is good and that he is flawless.

So, when we talk about holding up the shield of faith of what we believe, it's grounded in the character of God, but it's also rooted in the Word of God. You see, at the heart of this question and at the heart of holding up the shield of faith is this question: Can I really trust or have faith that God's Word is true? Or do I sort of pick and choose based on what the culture tells me. Do I actually, really believe the Word of God is inspired and that it is without error?

If you and I could sit down and have a conversation over a cup of coffee and we might talk about navigating life in this century, one of the things that I would point you to, based on my 50 years of following Jesus, is if you are going to hold up the shield of faith and do battle successfully in this culture, you've got to become a serious student of God's word. That's not just for pastors, that's for all of us. For you to become a student of God's word, to dig into it, to learn it, to meditate on it, to memorize it, to let it inform your decisions, to spend time investing in it.

Years ago, I heard a guy, Leonard Sweet. He was talking about his mom. She was approaching 90 years of age and she had become quite frail and was mentally beginning to slip. One day he noticed, after she had kind of an episode, that he just needed to do something. He said, "Mom, I'm taking you to the doctor." She said, "I'm not going." He said, "Oh, yes you are," and she said, "I'm not going." He said, "I'm not asking; I'm taking you."

He picked up his 90-pound mother in his arms and began to take her to the car. When he does, he walks by the coffee table sitting in the front entry way of his house. On the coffee table was her purse and her Bible. She didn't grab for her purse, she grabbed for her Bible.

He takes her to the doctor and the doctor sits down with her and very gently says, "Can you tell me the name of the president?" She couldn't think of who the president was." He said, "Can you tell me what today's date or day of the week it is?" She couldn't remember. Finally, the doctor pointed over at Leonard and said, "Do you know his name?" In that moment, she couldn't recall her son's name.

The doctor turned to Leonard and said, "I want to keep your mom. I want to do some tests and observe her for a little bit. Leonard said, "Well, I'm supposed to speak out of town this evening, but I can cancel my speaking engagement." The doctor said, "That's not necessary. We're going to take good care of your mom. In fact, I'm going to let you have the nurse's direct number because the nurse that's going to take care of your mom, her name is Joy."

Leonard turns to his mom and says, "Mom, I'm going to be gone for a little bit, but this lady, Joy, is going to take care of you. And Mom, do you remember what you always taught us when we were kids?" And he started to quote a Bible verse. He said, "The joy..." And then his mom just filled in the blanks. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." I'll never forget what Leonard said. He said, "When my mom couldn't remember the president or the day of the week or my name, her life had been so marinated in the word of God that that's what came out." My challenge to you is to marinate yourself in the Word of God. Spend time every day. Read it. Learn it. That's the objective body of faith that we are holding onto in our generation.

But there's not just the objective side, but there is also the subjective side. There's the subjective side that is really about personal trust. This is a verb. Again, I want to be really honest with you for a few moments. It's pretty easy to take up your shield of faith and to sing songs about trusting God as long as life is sunny and everything is up and to the right and you've got a job and the kids are good and your health is working fine. It's pretty easy to trust God when everything is good. But what about when all hell breaks loose in your life and you're predictable, orderly life comes unraveled?

As I have been preparing for this message, looming in the background is an experience we've been walking through for the last three months. On June 30th, we got a call for a pastor friend of mine in Colorado. His first church job was when we hired him to be our college pastor and work with our small groups. I performed a wedding ceremony for him and his wife. We've been in their life for 25 years.

They had been on the lake on a houseboat and their three daughters had invited four friends. The seven girls were riding in an SUV in front of the parents on the way home. In order to swerve to miss a car, the young lady driving the SUV overcorrected and the car rolled multiple times, landing on its roof. It was a terrible, horrible accident. One of the girls that was severely injured just got out of the hospital; she's been in there 80 something days. My friends rushed over to the scene and their 21-year-old, college aged daughter was crushed underneath the car.

It's been really hard, as a friend, to walk with them, but I can't even imagine the horror of what they're going through. That one moment changed their entire life. In some ways, their life will now be defined by that moment, right? This horrible tragedy, devastating loss. Most of us will never walk through anything like that, but it does raise an important question. Can you pick up the shield of faith and trust God even when life comes apart?

I always think about Job because he's a case study when it comes to this, right? One day Job comes in front of God and God points out Job and says, "Gosh, he's the most righteous man on all the earth." And Satan says, "Well, of course he is. He's got it made. Take all the stuff away from him and he'll curse you." God says, "You can do anything to him except take his life."

Now, it's really important to remember, when you read the Book of Job, that Job is completely unaware of the conversation that takes place in heaven. The Bible says that just the next day or so, he gets word that his entire business has been devastated, all of his livestock killed, all the camels, all these animals gone. Not only that, but all of his servants have been killed in a raid. And then he gets the word that his ten kids were all together and a freak windstorm caused the house to collapse on them and all of them died. And then Job is covered from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head with sores.

Job's wife comes and whispers in his ear, "Just curse God and die. There's nothing to live for anymore. Just end it." Somehow Job has this courage to just say, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" If you read those early chapters in Job when he loses everything, for the next 35 chapters, there is this wrestling match and emotional roller coaster that Job is on. There are moments when his faith surges and he trusts God. Then there are moments when he's angry and demands an answer from God. And there are moments when he wishes he'd never been born. There are moments when his friends accuse him, that things like this only happen to people that God is judging and disciplining. In 35 chapters, God doesn't say a word. Heaven is silent. And the silence is absolutely deafening.

So, what do you do when you don't understand, and the silence is deafening? Well, Job picks up his shield of faith... I think the key verse, the pentacle verse of the entire book of Job happens in the 13th Chapter and the 15th Verse. I want you to look at what Job says. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." There is this moment of humble willingness to leave some questions unanswered. And a quiet decision to trust and believe that God is good when all the evidence says otherwise.

We are called upon to stand on the objective faith of the Word of God, but also to learn to walkout what it looks like to actually trust God in real life when it comes apart.

2. Use your God-given decider. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son when the prodigal son comes to his dad and says, “Hey, I want my inheritance now; I don’t want to wait until your die.”? The only thing more amazing than his brash request is that his dad goes along with it. He gives him his inheritance. It says the kid leaves home, free from the restrictions and the rules of home. And his pockets are loaded with money, and he’s going to do anything he wants, whenever he wants because now he can pay for it.

He goes off to a distant country, lives the party lifestyle. He runs out of money. The Bible says he squanders every dime he had. We don’t know how it happened, how long it happened, but he goes through all of his money and then he is destitute. Then the Bible says not only has he been foolish, but now a famine hits the land. He gets a job. The only job he can find is feeding pigs. Now, that wouldn’t be appealing to most any of us, but especially if you are Jew, this was the most despicable kind of job that you could have. Then to even go one rung lower in life, he’s in the pen with the pigs and what the pigs are eating starts to look pretty good to him. And then come these words. These are the words of a moment of self-leadership when he uses his decider. Here are the words. It says, “And when he came to himself...” And when he came to himself. It’s a moment where there’s this lucid clarity around who he is and that his life doesn’t have to be this way, that he can change it.

I just want to say to every one of us, God has given us a decider. And every day you wake up and you make choices about all kinds of things: what you’re going to spend your money on, how your time is going to be used. You make decisions about who you’re going to love and what you’re going to value and what your priorities are going to be. And there are some things that are going to come into your life that you have absolutely no control over. My friends had no control over the accident that day. What they do have control over is how they choose to walk through that. How they choose to respond in this situation where they have little control. And will you pick up the shield of faith?

But let’s not airbrush this. we’re not talking about something that’s simple. I don’t care how long you’ve walked with Jesus, how mature you are, even the best of us can have our world rocked and our faith shaken. This thing that we went through with our friends, especially for my wife... It just rocked her. It brought questions that I didn’t think she’d ever have. One of the things I appreciate about the Bible is it doesn’t airbrush human suffering. It doesn’t airbrush the human struggle of people who walk through times of suffering. And there are lots of passages just like Job’s story where people wrestle with God and life’s inequities, and they have some gut level, visceral questions and even accusations that get directed toward God. You know what else I love about scripture? God’s okay with the doubts. God’s okay with the questions.

I think of Psalm 77 where the psalmist cynically asks, “Hey, God, have you forgotten to be gracious? Have you slammed the door on your compassion?” And then he sort of cynically concludes, “This is my fate. The most high has turned his hand against me.”

Again, I don't know where you are today, what life is like for you in this moment, but maybe you're wrestling with some hard questions. Maybe you're hurting, looking for relief, healing, answers, and maybe like the psalmist, you find yourself with some anger and some cynicism. I just want to say to you that it's okay. God can handle it. He's fine with you walking out those questions.

Here's a little formula that's been helpful for me: Doubt + Surrender + Trust = Freedom.

As good as Christian books are and podcasts and your small group and coming to church, there are sometimes in life when it just has to be you and God. And you have to work through some stuff and what you really believe, Can you walk with the shield of faith lifted high in the middle of your circumstances? There comes a moment, with all of your doubts, you just surrender and say, "God, I'm just choosing to lay this down and I'm choosing to trust you even though the circumstances don't make sense to me." And there is no shortcut, no easy formula, but I think that doubt can sort of lead to a sort of humble surrender, which leads to a faith and trust that ultimately results in us being able to live in freedom. But I get to choose. I get to use my decider for what comes into my life.

3. Activate the Shield of Faith. We can study Ephesians 6: 16, we can do a word study on the Greek, and we can analyze it and dissect it and we can study it, but at the end of the day, a shield is to be picked up and used. So, the third challenge is for you to actually activate the shield of faith. If you go back to Ephesians 6, I don't want you to miss the end of the verse because he says, "We pick of the shield of faith so that we can extinguish the flaming arrows, these attacks that come at us from the evil one. Notice that the things that come into your life sometimes are not just random circumstances, they are actually attacks from the evil one, not from some generic, abstract, amorphous force, but from a real person who would love to destroy and kill you.

In John 10, Jesus speaks about Satan. He says, "He is a thief and that his purpose is to rob and kill and destroy."

But we don't have to be afraid because the Bible says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." We are overcomers. We have been given victory in Christ.

Did you know the Bible never tells you to run from Satan? It does tell you to run from temptation, to flee youthful lust, but it doesn't ever tell you to run from Satan. The Bible says you just square off, take your battle stance, and one of the things that will allow you to resist him in your life is when you hold up the shield of faith.

Sometime, the only thing you have to hold onto is the hope and promise for a better future. And sometimes that doesn't come until after death. The truth is you may exit this life and never have it all understood, have it all buttoned up and explained. But trust says, "I know that on the other side of this life, there is a future that God has for me that doesn't have pain, doesn't have sickness, doesn't have cancer, doesn't have loss.

Paul says it like this. "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long, they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever."

So, we don't look at the troubles we can see now, we fix our gaze on the things that cannot be seen, for the things we see now will be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."

Here's what I want you to see. Your faith, this shield of faith, lives in the gap between the already and the not yet, between what you already are experiencing, what you're already going through, and the not yet promise of God that someday all the pain, all the questions, all the fear will be gone.

Philip Yancy says, "The Bible never belittles human disappointment, but it does add one key word – temporary. What we feel now, we will not always feel. Our disappointment is itself a sign, an aching, a hunger for something better and faith is, in the end, a kind of homesickness for a home that we have never visited but we have been promised."

So, here's my challenge. Just change one word. I want you to move from "what if" thinking to "even if." So, instead of what if this happens... What if I lose the job? What if my retirement crashes? Then we go even if, I'm going to choose to trust God. Just that one word would change everything.

John 6... The one miracle that Jesus did that's recorded in all four gospels is when he takes the fishes and loaves and feeds the multitudes. The Bible says that it was a massive miracle. There were 5,000 men, not counting women and children, there that day. You can imagine the buzz around the community about this.

Everybody comes back the next day and Jesus says, "You're not here because you want to follow me, you're just here because I fed you yesterday." And then the Bible says he gave them a hard teaching. He began to tell them that life was more than just food and drink and that really what they needed to do was to make the choice to become his follower. And the Bible says that when all these people heard this, do you know what they began to do? They just turned around and walked away. So, imagine that scene. Hundreds, maybe thousands of them just kind of turning and going, "Yeah, we're not interested." Do you know what Jesus does? He looks at his twelve disciples and says, "So, what about you guys? Are you going to leave too?"

I love Peter's response. Here's what he says, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Where else would we go? "You alone have the Words of eternal life We've come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In the life of every Christ follower, there comes a moment when you have to put a stake in the ground and it is your declaration of trust and you say, "Even when life makes no sense, I'm going to hold up the shield of faith and choose to trust you. Where else would we go?"

My prayer for you is that you would carry these words throughout this week. Father, thank you for letting us be here today. Lord, I have no idea where people are individually in this journey, but I pray for those who are hurting, those who are confused, filled with fear, confusion, questions. I pray that today you would meet them and give them hope and comfort and your presence today. And may we walk this week and hold up the shield of faith. In Jesus name... Amen.