

## **Put “F” Back in FAITH**

GT: 1 Timothy 6:12

Intro: 4 Sermon series: Put F back in FAITH. Put A back in FAITH. Put I back in FAITH. Put TH back in FAITH.

Intro: Sign at Birmingham Southern College library: To your faith add knowledge. Based on 2 Peter 1:5-6: *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.* Many Christians have enough knowledge. They don't need to add more knowledge to their faith. Now they need to add to their knowledge FAITH. This is what I'm feeling about myself. I have achieved knowledge. Now I need to add more faith to it.

Here are three components of this faith beginning with the letter F: Focus, Fight, and Future.

### **Put the FOCUS / FAITHFULNESS back in FAITH: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25**

When I bought my first motorcycle I took a motorcycle training course offered by state police. I learned how to avoid the danger of motorcycle drift. The motorcycle will go where you focus your attention. When going around a turn, focus your attention around the turn, not at the cars coming toward you, especially big trucks. If you focus your attention on the cars coming toward you, then you will drift too close to the double yellow line and into the cars. You will go where you focus your attention.

What is the focus of faith? Many people talk about faith, but what do they really have faith in? They have faith in themselves, faith in their abilities, faith in another imperfect person, or they have faith in their faith. The focus of biblical faith cannot be in anything created, imperfect, or temporal. God must always be the focus of faith. We move toward what you focus our faith on.

Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem: Mark 11:12-14. Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree that had leaves but no fruit. It was not the season for figs. Jesus pronounced a curse on the fig tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” When Jesus got to the temple he cleansed one of the courts of the temple. It wasn't bearing spiritual fruit of prayer to YHWH (11:15-19). He chased out money-changers and those who sold pigeons. (*Poor people sacrificed pigeons.*) The next day Peter was shocked to see the dead fig tree.

Mark 11:20-25: <sup>20</sup>As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. <sup>21</sup>And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” <sup>22</sup>And Jesus answered them, “**Have faith in God.**” <sup>23</sup>Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. <sup>24</sup>Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup>And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Jesus responded, “Have faith in God.” Jesus didn’t give any interpretation to the cursing of the fig tree. Jesus didn’t say, “This dead fig tree represents barren Israel and the temple I cleaned out yesterday.” (*The fact that gospel writer Mark inserts it in between may indicate he meant it to represent barren Israel.*) Jesus focused on faith. He emphasized the importance of faith.

What did Jesus mean when he said, “Have faith in God?” “Have faith in God” can be understood in two ways. The literal meaning is “you have the faith of God.” It can be understood as an exhortation or encouragement. As an exhortation Jesus meant, “You can have faith in God like I have; a faith without any doubt in the heart.” As an encouragement Jesus meant, “You have the faithfulness of God with you, so pray believing he will answer.” So, whether it is an exhortation (more likely) or an encouragement the point is faith stays focused on God and his faithfulness.

The prayer promises of verses 23-24 is grounded on God’s faithfulness and not the ability of a person to banish doubt from his/her heart. Basic to both meanings of Jesus statement is the concept of faith as confidence in the power and goodness of God for whom nothing is impossible. (*William Lane, NICNT, The Gospel of Mark, 409*)

Faith does not focus on the mountain. Whatever your mountain/problem is faith focused on God will move it. Jesus promised answers to prayer based on the faithfulness and goodness of God and forgiveness. Faith that moves mountains is persistent. The meaning is “you keep having the faith of God.” (*GR present imperative*). Faith that throws mountains into the sea is always focused on God and his faithfulness to answer.

### **Put the FIGHT / FEARLESSNESS Back in FAITH: 1 Timothy 6:11-16**

1 Timothy 6:11-16: <sup>11</sup>But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. <sup>12</sup>**Fight the good fight of the faith.** Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about

*which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, <sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

This exhortation to Pastor Timothy is to flee the love of money in ministry and maintain his confession of faith in Christ. Living a godly life and maintaining a good confession is a fight. It's a good fight; it is a fight worth fighting.

The world is not a retirement community. The world is not a playground. It's a battlefield. Faith is a fight! We are soldiers. (If you don't believe it, then read Ephesians 6. All the physical battles in the OT represent spiritual battles for us as we obey Christ's command.) Faith has a fighting spirit in it. Faith is not passive. Faith does not passively accept circumstances that are contrary to God's will.

Faith has an adversary and accuser - Satan. We don't fight each other. We fight against the accuser: Revelation 12:10: *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."* The book of Job shows how Satan accuses and God's response.

Using the analogy of a courtroom, Satan is the prosecuting attorney and Jesus Christ is our defense attorney. We have the best defense attorney. Read Zechariah 3. Satan accused Joshua the high priest. The angel of the LORD rebuked Satan and silenced him. The angel of the LORD is Jesus. Satan accuses, but Jesus Christ clothes us with his righteousness.

Satan the accuser shoots at us fiery arrows of fear, doubt, self-condemnation, and temptations to pride.

Faith fights with a shield. Ephesians 6:16: *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

The shield of faith would be comparable to a Kevlar bullet-proof vest and the thick armor plating on Humvees to stop IEDs.

Faith is necessary to shield us from fiery arrows, bullets and IEDs. They are fears, doubts, self-condemnation, temptations to pride, and worries that grow unbelief in us. Faith is designed to protect against explosions of fear and doubt. It happens like this... you're driving down the road of life and suddenly the enemy

detonates an IED under your Humvee. The explosion is some form of unexpected trouble like loss of job, money to a scammer, health to a disease, loss of a relationship to death, or struggles with your children. Faith fights. It resists and remains firm. 1 Peter 5:6-9: <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* <sup>7</sup> *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* <sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

The devil can devour us in our anxieties. Fight with faith.

In 2007, my oldest daughter, Tamlyn, and I went on a mission trip to Belize. After the mission we drove to Guatemala to see our Compassion child. In Guatemala the rental jeep was broken into and the radio was stolen. It was like a fiery arrow, an unseen IED exploding. My shield of faith protected me from fear, doubt, and discouragement. I thought, “At least I got our luggage out before and the thief didn’t steal the Chevy Tracker.” Our translator told us not to bother filing a police report – we would’ve missed our visit with Karina. Satan’s IED was probably an attempt to thwart our visit.

I’ve had to fight the fight of faith against fear and doubt several times since moving here... car accidents, scammers, maggots and flies.

The fight of faith pushes away fear and doubt, anxieties, self-condemnation, and pride, and keeps its focus on God.

### **Put FUTURE back in FAITH: Hebrews 10:35-39**

Moving forced me to look at the past. We have boxes and boxes of photo albums and old letters. (*I kept all the letters Sandie and I wrote to each other when I returned to the States and she remained in Hong Kong waiting for the wedding.*) I also inherited the photo albums of my parents. I’m going through them deciding what to keep or throw away. I have noticed that a focus on the past makes me unprepared for the future. It’s good to remember God’s faithfulness in the past, but I want to keep moving forward into God’s future for me. I want to keep my faith focused on the future.

Faith is like a car. It has a small rear-view mirror, and a big front windshield to see the road ahead. We need to put the Future back in FAITH.

Faith has a rear-view mirror; it looks back at the past. We have faith in a past historical event, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every Communion

is a look in the rear-view mirror. We remember the sacrifice of Christ for our sins and His presence with us in the moment. Focusing on the resurrection and ascension of Christ to God the Father's right hand is looking through the big front windshield. Christ holds all power and authority. (*I have never heard a sermon on the ascension of Christ and its significance for the church.*) His Spirit is active in the world 24-hours a day empowering us to obey Christ's Great Commission. Focusing on the second coming of Christ in power and glory is looking through the big front windshield.

The future looks scary right now. The world will get darker and more rebellious against God and his created order. Nation will rise against nation. There will be trade wars and rumors of wars. There will be protests for freedom. There will be natural disasters. There will be persecution for faith in Christ. Faith has no fear of the future.

Hebrews 10:35-39: <sup>35</sup> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

<sup>37</sup> FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,  
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

<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.

My righteous one shall live by faith –

- Faith that focuses the faithfulness of the Father.
- Faith that fights the accuser and his lies.
- Faith that focuses on the future and doesn't shrink back in fear.

We have faith in a promised future historical event, the second coming of Christ. "He who is coming will come and will not delay."