

Fighting for Faith with God's Word

by John Piper

My assignment is to talk about fighting the fight of faith with the word. You know, I suppose, that that idea of fighting for faith is from 1 Timothy. "Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of eternal life to which you were called. 1 Timothy 6:12. Or 1 Corinthians 9:26, Paul says, "I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I pommel my body to keep it under control lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. Or 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight. I have kept the faith. I have finished my course. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the Judge, will give not only to me but to those who have loved his appearing. So you have to these verses that speak of the fight of faith. And it is a good fight. Not all fight are good, but this one's good.

Now what I want to do, is give six, seven, eight clarifying observations about this fight. And I'd like to do the first half of the message on those and the last half on practical outworkings of these and how you use them against specific kinds of threats to your faith.

Observation #1: The fight for faith is a fight to the death

I used to think that the life of faith was a more or less straight line at a diagonal, from total lostness to total perfection. When I was sixteen I would look forward to ten more years of faithful patience by the time I'm twenty-six, and ten more years of faithful patience by the time I'm thirty-six, and then ten more years of faithful patience by the time I'm forty-six, and I thought that it would just get better and better. Now I'm sixty-two and I've scrapped that vision.

Let me clarify now a phrase that I think misleads us: justification. I'm groping for a word that doesn't sound high falutin' here, but take it anyway—justification is *punctiliar*. It's at a point. It doesn't happen a lot of times. It's not a process. It's *instantaneous*.

Now we usually say sanctification—growth in holiness—is progressive. Now that's misleading, perhaps. It's not misleading to say that justification happens at a point; that's really valuable and essential to get - that our transformation into the likeness of Christ is incremental and happens progressively. However, I've never heard anybody talk about regressive sanctification. And I believe in it. It's not good. It's bad. And it's real. You're not old enough to know this for sure, you know it a little bit, but you can fight from age six at your mother's knee, you're born again, to age thirty-six fighting valiantly, growing mightily and at age forty-six be languishing in the wilderness.

So, the point of this clarifying observation is to say that the fight is a mortal fight to the death. Never get to a point where you say, "OK. I have fought valiantly for thirty years and I want to coast and stay at that level." You won't. You're in a river swimming upstream. The river is sin, culture, demonic influences, your own abiding corruption, and if you stop swimming, you go backward. You don't stay at your level of sanctification. So that's observation and clarification number one.

Observation #2: The fight of faith is a fight for joy

Saving faith, I'm gonna argue, includes as part of it, not all of it, a treasuring of Christ, a being satisfied in Christ, a delighting in Christ. And I don't think faith is a decision and these other things are the icing on the real commitment cake. I don't think so. The new birth brings about a new heart. And even though it's a baby heart and an imperfect heart and an immature heart, it's a real, new heart with at least seeds of this kind of affection for Christ, a treasuring of Christ, an embrace of Christ.

Now I've got to give you some reasons for believing that because it may be the most important thing because it maybe really shapes how you fight. Here are several bases for that claim that the fight for faith is a fight for joy in Christ.

1. First argument. In 2 Corinthians 1:24, we read this. Paul says, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy." And you would expect him to say faith. And he doesn't. He says, "Not that we lord it over your faith but we work with you for your joy." He substitutes joy for faith and he says, "My apostolic vocation is to labor for your joy," and he's just called it faith.
2. Second argument. John 1:12: "He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. But to as many who received him, who believed on his name, he gave the power to become the children of God." There's a little parallel between "to as many who received him" that is, "believed." So I think that verse defines believing as receiving. So, when you, if you're one of those who got prayed for tonight, and you want to know how do you do this, what happens, what is the conscious experience of the new birth, one answer is that it is a spiritual, inward, welcoming, receiving, embracing of Christ. That's believing. That's believing. You hear who He is, what he's done and you are receiving. Now my question is, receive as what? And I fear that the answers some give are only utilitarian Savior. From hell. Yes, by all means. But there are all kinds of utilitarian people in our lives whom we don't admire, just useful. They supply things we want, though we don't want them. It's not enough to receive Jesus as savior, unless savior means saved to love him, saved to know him, saved to embrace him. He's the treasure. So I'm arguing that this verse, "As many as received him he gave the power to become the children of God," is a receiving of Jesus. Not simply as a utility, but as your treasure.

3. Third argument. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." This is John 6:35. "I am the bread of life and He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Now notice the parallel between coming and not hungering and believing and not thirsting. Parallels work like that. They define each other. So in that verse, believing is a coming to him so as to satisfy soul thirst. That's what saving faith is.
4. Fourth argument. It's the shortest parable in the Bible. Matthew 13:44: "The kingdom of God is like a man who found a treasure in a field, covered it over, and from his joy, he goes and sells all he has and buys that field. That's a picture of conversion. Conversion is stumbling upon the treasure, who is Christ, King Christ and finding him so valuable, everything else can be sold and you'll have everything you need. And that's what I'm arguing saving faith includes.
5. Fifth argument. I've been thinking for five or six years now of how to complete the gospel in evangelical language so that it is whole and not fragmentary. The gospel has at least five components, and when you get them all together, then you see that believing the gospel is enjoying Christ. Here are the pieces. You know them, but the last one you may not emphasize like I want you to: 1) Gospel is event. Christ died for our sin. 2) The gospel is accomplishment or achievement. He died for our sins. When he died, righteousness is completed and provided and sin is covered for all the elect. 3) The gospel is a free offer. If the achievement is offered you for works, then there is no gospel. It is offered freely. There's nothing you can do to earn it, merit it. All you can do is receive it. 4) When that happens, something is applied to us of the achievement of the cross. And the application is justification, forgiveness of sins. My sins are covered. Righteousness is counted to me. That's part of the gospel. It didn't just happen. Being purchased and completed at the cross, it now gets, through faith, by the Holy Spirit, applied to me so that I know myself forgiven and I know myself righteous.

And there's where we usually stop. To which I want to say, "So what?" So what I'm forgiven?" There must be some assumptions here. Why do you want to be forgiven? There are a lot of bad answers to that question. "I don't like a guilty conscience." "It feels bad." "I lose sleep." Those are bad answers. It's true but it's not very Christ-exalting. "I don't want to go to hell. It's hot." "My marriage would certainly be better if I didn't labor under such a guilty conscience." And this list of bad answers goes on. I'll tell you why you want to be forgiven if you're a Christian. You want to be forgiven because sin stands between you and Jesus and you want to Him. He's your treasure. You want to be with him. You want to fellowship with him. You want to talk with him. You want to see his glory. So I wrote a book called "God Is the Gospel." His gifts are not the gospel. God is the gospel. His gifts are all means to get to Him. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "He suffered once the righteous for the unrighteous that he

might bring us to God.” That’s the gospel. And until you get there, he’s a ticket in your back pocket. You know what you do with tickets when you get to the play or the theatre? You throw them in the garbage because you got what you wanted—the theatre, the show, the ball game. And if Jesus is just a ticket, he’s not honored. So, my fifth argument for why the fight for faith is a fight for joy is that believing the gospel in its fullness means treasuring all that God is for you in Christ. Treasuring.

6. Sixth argument. I’ll give you one last argument for that point. I was with R.C. Sproul two years ago in Orlando at one of the Ligonier conferences, and he was speaking just before I did and he was arguing about the nature of faith. And I can’t remember if he put the chair there or I just imagined the chair there, but there’s a chair. And you’ve heard this illustration. And he said, “Now, do you believe the chair can hold you up?” And everyone said, “Yeah, it can hold you up.” Sproul continued, “You’re not willing to believe the chair can hold you up if you’re not willing to sit in the chair.” End of illustration. So I was speaking next. I like to fix talks that go before me (and I haven’t been here (at Na) so I can’t fix any talks). I know that R.C. Sproul is watching this on the video screen back in the speaker’s lounge. So, I’m not being careless here and I said, “Okay, we’ve got a problem here. You’re saying that, ‘Faith is not just believing that the chair can hold you up. That’s Jesus able to save you. But will you sit on him. Will you give your life to him.’” And everything about that is right. However, I asked, in front of 5,000 people, ‘What if the chair is ugly and you don’t like it? It’s just ugly. It’s a lousy chair, but I’m tired so I guess I’ll have to sit in the chair.’ Is that saving faith? It is not. So, he came out between sessions and sat down next to me and put his arm around me and said, “The chair is there. It is beautiful.” Or, another way to say it would be this. Now this gets a little more William Tyndale-like: Are you willing to sit in the chair if 1,000 arrows are aimed at your face to fly if you sit in the chair? Illustrations need to be pushed to the fullness of the gospel. The fight for faith is the fight for treasuring him. It’s a fight for delighting in him. It’s a fight for being satisfied in him. It’s not just a fight to trust him for something. He’s the end of the quest. He’s not a means merely.

Ok. That’s clarifying observation number 2. The first one was, there is such a thing as regressive sanctification. It’s not a straight line. You’ve got to fight to the end. You can’t coast. And the second one now is the fight for faith is the fight for joy in Christ.

Observation #3: The fight for the joy of faith is not the opposite of suffering

Clarifying observation #3 is joy in Christ is not the opposite of suffering. This is another way of saying the fight for the joy of faith is not a fight for the prosperity gospel. It’s not a fight for health, wealth, and prosperity. What I would, in fact, argue is that it’s a fight for that alone which can enable you to suffer. It’s a fight

for a relationship with Jesus that enables you to say, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

That's what I want more than anything. I want to be so related to Jesus so that if my wife dies and I get a phone call tonight, and my little girl dies in one of those awful tornadoes that was dancing around Minneapolis yesterday and took out a little two-year-old in Hugo, Minnesota, just a stone's throw away from my house. If that happened at 1801 11th Avenue, and my wife and child were gone, I would say, "Christ is all." And he will be there. I will not ever abandon him I will not ever fault him for anything. I will always embrace him. I will always fly to him. That's the way I want to relate to Jesus. That's saving faith.

Clarifying observation #4: We fight for faith not to get God to be 100% for us, but because God *is* 100% for us

The first observation was regressive sanctification, the second one was the fight for joy, the third one is that it's not a fight to escape suffering, it's a fight to so relate to him that you can endure suffering. Here's #4: We fight for a faith not to get God to be 100% for us but because he is 100% for us.

In Christ, this is one that is so hard to live by because the devil and our flesh and the whole legalistic scheme of the universe under the fall is pulling us in another direction. I know that there will be dozens of you who will go out of here misunderstanding this message. I know that because the devil is a liar. You are going to go out and you're going to feel, even if you don't say, "He made it sound like I get justified, I get God on my side, by the vigilance of my warfare." You're going to say it. You're going to feel it because you're wired to be that way. So I'm going to say right here, and rescue as many of you from that misunderstanding as I can: it's not what I believe. It's not what the Bible teaches. You cannot make any progress in the Christian life until you believe that God is already 100% on your side, not 99%. If you think that there's this little piece that's left that could result in my being opposed by my God if I don't get him to be on my side, then you don't understand justification. "He who did not spare his only son but gave him up for us all, will he not with him, freely give us all things?" "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" He's God. Jesus Christ died and was raised. If God is for us, for us, who can be against us? Now all of that happened through faith in Christ alone. Christ is your righteousness, not incrementally. Christ is not carved up. If you have Christ by faith alone, you have God totally on your side. Which means that whatever horrible thing happens in this coming year, He's not against you. He's not against you. We've been singing about that. It's very hard to believe, very true, very essential. When we think of the fight of faith, we're fighting to believe that, not to get it to be true. That's #4.

Observation #5: The fight for joy, the fight for faith, is a fight to see Christ

Focus on this idea of seeing. Here's what I mean. I know He's in heaven, he's not on the earth, and he's not physically here. He will be, but not yet. Paul in Ephesians 1:18 refers to the eyes of the heart. He prays that the eyes of the heart would be illumined or enlightened so that Christians can see the unseen. Now this is something probably a good many of you haven't thought a lot about and it can sound a little spooky. "Whew. Have I ever experienced that?" And you probably have even if you don't know you have. You certainly have if you're a believer. But you may have never been taught that vocabulary.

Now what happened in the new birth is that the eyes of the heart were illumined so that the cross ceased to be foolishness and became the wisdom of God. That's what happened. If you once upon a time considered Christianity boring, stupid, irrelevant, scary... and then something happened and today when you look at the cross, you just want to sing because there is so much wisdom and so much love and so much justice and so much power in what happened there. What happened in your life is that the eyes of your heart were opened. That's the vocabulary of the New Testament.

Jesus said to one group of people, "Seeing, they do not see." That implies there are two ways to see. You can see with these eyes [points to eyes in face] and you can see with these eyes [points to heart]. And he said to the Pharisees, "They're good with these [eyes in face]. And these [points to heart] are blind." We were all blind. Now, where do you see God or Christ? The Bible has two basic answers. One is nature and the other is the Bible.

Ps 19:1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament is declaring his handiwork." Now, the heavens are something you see. You don't hear the stars, you see them. The stars, sun, the moon, clouds, microscope in the other direction the stunning creation. And the Bible says, what's happening there is that if you have eyes to see, you can see the glory of God. That's amazing. Scientists look at it. Some of them see the glory of God and some of them don't because their eyes of the heart are either opened or not opened.

The more important way we see is by the word. It's the infallible way that God reveals himself and here are two verses that are so key to it. 1 Samuel 3:21: "The Lord appeared again at Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord." Now two times he uses this language of "seeing." He appeared at Shiloh. He revealed himself at Shiloh to Samuel—and then it adds this—"by the word of the Lord." There are eyes in your ears. Hear that? He revealed himself. He appeared to Samuel by what he heard. Now we're real close to the nitty gritty of how you fight for faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." And now we've learned that seeing comes by hearing. And the reason I'm stressing this is because of 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We all with unveiled face, beholding"—that's a seeing word—"beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to the next." So, the way you are transformed, the way your life is changed

and you are filled with delight in treasuring Christ, is by seeing him in what you hear.

2 Corinthians 4:4 may be the most important word on this because it focuses on the gospel and not just the word of God in general, it says, “In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds” —so there’s the blinding of the inward eyes— “has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” When the gospel is faithfully spoken, which it has in many cases in this conference, when the gospel is spoken, this text says that there’s a glory in it, a spiritual glory, not a physical glory, but a spiritual beauty. And the devil blinds unbelievers from seeing it, and the new birth is the removal of the scales, so that when the story is told, about Christ, about his life, about his death, about his resurrection, about his achievement, and all his character, the whole story is told we see beauty. We see glory. And it is self-evidencing.

So if you were to ask me how do you fight doubt in your life, I give some effort to apologetic works, but mainly I fight to see the glory. Because the bottom-line for being saved is the eyes of our hearts opened and we see something nobody can contradict. Calvin said it was the difference between a blind man and a man seeing the sun. How do you know that that globe is light? What kind of arguments would you give? Would you give chemical arguments, physical arguments? You’d say, “I see it.” That’s basically how people get saved. The eyes of the heart are opened and you see glory in the gospel.

OK. here I am at my practical part now that more than half has been taken up. So, we’ll do the best we can. This all implies—what, I’ve given you five clarifying observations—a sixth, although you could renumber them now by way of implication as these are now the implications: clarifying observation #6 or implication #1.

Observation 6: Major on the Word of God

Major, in your life, on the word of God. “The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.” “Your words were found and I ate them. And your words became to me a joy and a delight.” “These things I have spoken to you,” Jesus said, “that my joy may be in you and your joy might be full.” “His delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.” So those four texts, at least—Ps 19:8, Jeremiah 15:16, John 15:11, and Psalm 1:2—say that the word of God is the place where joy, the joy of faith, is stoked, preserved, energized, enabled, renewed, which is what has to happen in me everyday. So I’m pleading with you, built right into the framework of this conference, that you be people of the word everyday. That’s clarifying observation #6.

Observation 7: Two Ways to Major on the Word of God

And now here's clarifying observation #7. There are two ways to do that. One is in a disciplined way and the other is in a spontaneous way. I'm at the practical ground level of how I live now.

What I mean by a disciplined way of getting yourself in the word is
 You need **a time**, you need **a place**, and you need **a plan** for this book to get into your life so that its power to produce the joy of faith, conquer the devil, sanctify you, will be unleashed.

1975. I've been married seven years, finished school finally at age twenty-eight, and bought my first house with the \$17,000 inheritance that my mother left me when she was killed in '74. (That's the only reason I have a house because mom left us some money when she was killed.) We found a house and lo and behold, would you believe, it had been built without a prayer room?! Can you believe that? Unbelievable. You wouldn't build a house like that, would you? There's a place for the television but no place to pray. Can you believe that? A Christian would buy a house that has a place for a television and no place for prayer. That's ridiculous. I can't believe that. So, I went downstairs and I looked around and thought, "OK. Right over there, that's going to become the prayer place." I'm not a carpenter, so I had somebody else do that but I built my bench. I can build a bench. So I bought some pressed wood and I designed it so that when I'm like this, with my elbows like this, it's the right height. I built it. And, now this is a problem because your eyes change when you get older, I designed it so that when I was like this, with my elbows like this, where my Bible lay would be about four inches lower so that it wouldn't go fuzzy on me as I was reading. Now, I've got to take my glasses off to read because they don't work with these trifocals. So I built my bench. And I've got that bench now. And the study where I am now which was redesigned two years ago and they did it for as a gift from the church and they said, "Well, what do you want?" And I said, "Just save the bench." A little wall here, make the bench as invisible as possible when my kids butt in on me.

I have a place. You gotta have a place. Susannah Wesley, with sixteen kids, her place was in the kitchen with her apron over her head, and when the kids saw the apron over momma's head they shut up—and you can read about her way of raising children—and they shut up. You gotta find a place. It's not easy. Find it. Gotta find a time. In other words, if you let this just happen, like, "I'll read the Bible some time or some where or some way," the devil will have a field day with you and you'll come to 4:00 every afternoon and it won't have happened or you'll be lying in bed at night and it won't have happened. I don't know if you can see these, but those little tabs right there, those are my way. I've got the Discipleship Journal reading plan, I've been doing this for years. This is a through-the-Bible reading plan in my Bible, and I want to go through this every year at least once. So, a time, a place, a plan. Oh my. We could just talk forever about how to do that when you get there. Be focused. I would say if you can't be focused to write out the text. Write it. Write the text. Start writing. There are

more eyes in a pencil than you can imagine. You will see so many things. Query the text and memorize the text. “

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in a time of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains roar, though they tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams makes glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. He will help her right early. The nations rage and the kingdoms totter, He utters his voice. The earth melts. Behold, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come behold the works of the Lord, how he has wrought desolations to the ends of the earth. He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear and he burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth. Behold, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Ps 46)

There’s a story behind that memorization. That’s Psalm 46. My first year at Bethlehem (Bethlehem Baptist), I was called on the telephone, and Rollin Ericson’s wife had just had a heart attack. He was a great statesman of our church. I rushed so fast to be at the hospital that I forgot my Bible. I was a brand new pastor. I’d never been a pastor before. I was thirty-four-years old, as green as could be, and I didn’t know what to do anywhere at any time, I just loved the Bible and wanted to bless people with it. And I arrived. The waiting room was full of relatives and Rollin puts his arm around me and he says, “Give us a word, John.” Now I know a lot of Bible and even at thirty-four I knew a lot of Bible. My mind went blank. I think I murmured in my prayer John 3:16. Something. I felt so humiliated. I felt like I had let them down terribly. They didn’t feel that way. They were gracious. That’s why he was a statesman. I went home. I went to my bench and I got down and opened my Bible and said to the Lord, “That will never happen again.” And I nailed Psalm 46 that afternoon. And I’ve got a lot of other psalms ready to fight the devil with in this little, old, fading brain that has to work a lot harder now than it used to fight with the word of God. I plead with you: memorize Scripture.

Which leads to the other half of this seventh clarifying observation, namely spontaneous use of Scripture. And here I’ll just close with a slug of illustrations of how the spontaneous use of Scripture to fight for faith works. Here come these temptations to be unbelieving, to be lacking in joy, to doubt God, and what do you do? You don’t have your Bible everywhere. You’re working. You’re walking. You’re playing and thoughts come into your head or things happen and all kinds of difficulties emerge.

Anxiety: What about anxiety? So the threat of anxiety comes and you memorize Ps 56:3: “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.” My little girl knows that one so if she’s afraid, [she says] “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. When I am

afraid, I will trust in you.” Psalm 56:3 We have this fighter verse program at our church where we memorize a different verse every week and use them like that.

Feeling Useless: What about anxiety for uselessness? “Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing in the Lord that your labor is not in vain.” So here you are and a threat comes over you and you say, “I’m wasting my time. My ministry’s pointless. It’s not having any effect.” And that’s the devil talking. How do you stick him? You stick him with 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Everything done in the name of the Lord is not in vain.’ Get out of here. I believe in the promise.” This is the way I use the Bible day by day.

Feeling Weak: What about anxiety for feeling weak? You feel weak. You get on the plane in the morning and you come to Louisville and you feel spent. Where am I going to get the... I’m supposed to be the “passion guy”! Come on. Where am I going to get the strength? What am I going to do? Expectations are high. And the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient for you for my power will be made perfect in your weariness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

Needing Guidance: Or, what about the anxiety when you’re feeling in the need of guidance? A lot of you are probably in that situation. “What do I next? Who? When? How?” “I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. (Ps 32:8)” Or, one of my favorites, Psalm 25:8: “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore, he instructs sinners in the way.” I qualify. Isn’t that great? Isn’t that an incredible promise? “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore, he instructs sinners in the way.” Man, you can send the devil tumbling with that one.

Affliction: Or, anxiety about affliction. Katy Stellar, the daughter of my colleague Tom, she wrestled for seven years with colitis. And they finally did major surgery. And they said you’ll have immediate relief even though you don’t colon. Immediate relief and fourteen hours later she was so sick she was throwing up all the medicine they went back to the hospital. How does Katie fight for faith and joy? “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” She lies there, and she’s really good at this, you’ve got to sing the praises of grace in people like this, she knows how to appropriate the promises and she believes them.

Aging: What about anxiety about aging? I probably shouldn’t even bother you with that one. “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by me from birth, and have been carried from the womb, even to your old age I will be the same, and even to your graying years I will bear you. I have done it. I will carry you and I will bear you and I will deliver you. (Is 46:4)” Isn’t that good news for anxiety about aging?

Perseverance: This one relates. What about anxiety that you won't persevere to the end? Like, you hear me say, "You've got to fight to the end." And you go home tonight, and you lie down and this horrible feeling comes over you, "What if I don't? What if I can't make it? What if I don't persevere? You reach down into your scabbard and you pull out Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in me will complete it." There! I don't know any other way to live the Christian life than to take all these tidal waves of doubts that break over us and stick them with the word.

Death: What about death? You're going to be afraid of death? I promise you you are. And in your victorious moments...triumph! "Neither death nor hell can separate me..." And then there'll be another kind of moment and it will terrify you and then what will you do? Better have another sword in there. None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. "If we live, we live to the Lord. And if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose again that he might be Lord of the living and of the dead." (Rom 14:8) I tell you that text has served me so many times, both for others in hospital rooms and in my own soul late at night. Know some gospel promises about the triumph over death.

Greed: What about the threat to your faith of covetousness, of greed? You're starting to look at the internet. Hmm. I've only got an 8 GB iPhone. Not only is there a sixteen, but there's a "2", whatever that is. And there starts to be this discontent over such a little thing. You pull out the sword. Heb 13:5: "Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have for he has said, 'I will never leave you, I will never forsake you,' therefore, we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man or Apple do to me?"

Lust: Ok. what about lust? This is worth the whole sermon. Lust. There's a killer, right? It just conquers us again and again. Guys differently from gals, but gals for real, and more and more like guys. The statistics about internet porn are not encouraging for men and women. This lust thing is massive and it's a faith killer. Oh my. Where shall we turn? What will you pull out of your scabbard for this one? I'll give you two. We have so many. This is a hard battle. I'm sixty-two, it's still a hard battle. Sorry about that. It's not going to get easier. Well, it might. But it's not easy. So, you pull this one out: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And you know that when you click that button and that fills your mind, seeing him is harder, to put it mildly. If you don't, there will be vistas open to you that in the gutter of pornography or worse, you cannot see. I'm putting it positively. I'm not giving you the negative one—cut off your hand because if you don't you'll go to hell. That's there. Gouge out your eye because if you don't, you go to hell. I'm giving you the positive one. If you will turn from uncleanness, there will be vistas of divine pleasure opened to you that will not be open any other way and they will satisfy your soul longer and more deeply than any satisfaction offered by lust.

And here's a second one. This is Ps 84:11, which goes like this: "The Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord gives grace and glory." Here's the one that's hard to believe but really, really true: "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. The devil's gonna tell you that, "If you don't sleep with him or her, and you are chaste and you never marry and die never having had sex, you blew it! You're not even fully human." I've had people tell me that. If you obey Christ and are chaste and pure til marriage or your dying day, no good thing has he withheld from you. You know the best argument for that? I said this to a guy one time who was just furious at me because of the stand I took on public advertisements on condoms in the Twin Cities. And his argument was, "I'm not even human unless my girlfriend and I go all the way. It's what we're designed for. What's up with you?" And I said, "The most fully human person that ever lived never had sex. Ever. I'll take him over your view any day and his name is Jesus."

Bitterness: Lastly, the temptation of being destroyed by bitterness and unforgiveness and anger and vengeance. What do you do with it from abuse in your background? You can't let it go. The horrible betrayal in your life a year ago, you just cherish the anger. You get up thinking about it. You go to bed thinking about it. It's eating you up. What do you do? How do you fight for such joy in Christ, and such contentment in him, and such faith in him that that goes? How do you do that? What's the sword that you use? I'll give you two. They're very different ways of fighting. Eph 4:32: "Be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God, in Christ, forgave you." I've said I love Sovereign Grace's emphasis. I've said I loved New Attitude's emphasis. This is very close to the reason why I am so celebrative about what this movement is. It is so gospel-saturated. It is so gospel-driven. And right here you see how liberating that is.

I want to say something about Bob Kauflin's illustration of the kid who grew up in the home and he doesn't have any big testimony like drugs like CJ. That's a big testimony. And then there's me, can't ever remember being an unbeliever. My mother told me I prayed to receive Jesus when I was six. I don't remember. All you have to do, is a person like me, is accumulate about five days' worth of sin and that's all you need to know the massive grace it takes to keep me saved, let alone get me saved. So, the gospel is precious to me and I don't have that testimony. I've got another testimony. David Michael is my associate for twenty-five years in family discipleship and he loves to stand up and give his testimony like this: "God saved me from a life of drugs and a life of crime and a life of abuse when I was six." And it is always funny and it is always massively, gloriously true. And I don't think anybody should say anything about God saving them when they were six as though I missed out.

The other text, the other sword that you're pulling out against bitterness is this one. Oh this is deep. This is big. Get this. I'll keep it short. One of the reasons it is so hard to forgive real wrong against us and eats away at us and destroys joy

and destroys faith is because it was real wrong. It was unjust. And we feel like, "If I start acting kindly towards that dad or that uncle or former boyfriend or former spouse, if I start turning good for evil, it's going to look like, feel like, and maybe be like it wasn't bad what they did." That's what it feels like and that's why it keeps us from doing that. I mean, I feel that with my wife. She does something that annoys me that I think is not right, not good, I feel like, isn't this awful? I'm sixty-two. I'm a pastor. I feel like if I just say nice things to her she won't know how bad she was. And here's the answer. I've set it up with my wife so it's going to sound all wrong, but I'll read it anyway. This is Romans 12:9: "Never take vengeance on yourself, beloved, leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, 'I will repay,' says the Lord." Now you're laughing and I'm going to try to reel this in, make this serious. OK. You may not think that that applies to marriage. Well, if you dial it down just a little bit, it does. But I am really more concerned not about my marriage but about the 100 or 200 or 300 of you who have real, incredible injustice and horrible things that happened to you. Horrible things. Wrong things. Unjust things. And it is so hard to let it go because there is this one piece, namely, it would look as though the universal became amoral and this text is in the Bible. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay" means this, if that person has never been punished the way they deserve to be punished, and they probably haven't. Lay it down. Just say, "God there are two possibilities here: that sin that was committed against me is either going to be punished at the cross when that person repents, or in hell, when they don't repent, and I cannot improve on either of those acts of justice, therefore, I will now return good for evil." If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him drink. And you will bring coals of fire, and perhaps repentance, on his head. So, I would simply close by pleading with you to be people of the book. Get your sword fixed and be able to pull it out every day spontaneously because you've, in a disciplined way, given yourself to the word of God.

Father in heaven, I pray for these young people as they're setting out on a life-long journey of warfare against unbelief, against sin, against the devil, against the world, in order to preserve faith and preserve joy and preserve their heart's treasuring of Jesus Christ. Make good warriors, I pray, not against people, but against sin, against unbelief. Make them like trees planted by streams of water that bring forth fruit, whose leaf does not wither and in everything they do they prosper, in Christ I pray. Amen.