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How to fight the good fight of faith

The phrase “fight the good fight of faith” comes up several times in Paul’s letters to Timothy as Paul tries to encourage his good friend (*1 Timothy 1:18-19, 6:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:7*).

What is faith?

Hebrews 11 tells us that “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” There are two parts of faith required: an intellectual part that believes that something is true, and a trusting part that relies on it being true. We recognise that the chair is a chair and is designed to support a person sitting on it, and trust is actually sitting on the chair. Knowing facts about Jesus is not enough (*James 2:19*), we must stake our whole life on Him, put all our weight on what His life, death, and resurrection achieved for us.

Where does faith come from?

Faith is not something we are born with, or can conjure up ourselves, or get as a result of study or pursuing spiritual things – it is a gift from God (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). We haven’t earned it or deserve it, God simply gives us faith, along with His grace and mercy, so that He gets all the glory. He uses all sorts of means to impart faith to us: when we see miracles, hear testimony, by reading or hearing the Bible or good expounding of the Word (*John 11:45, 20:30-31, Acts 14:1, 17:11-12, Romans 10:17*).

The Bible is also clear that without faith we can’t please God and that faith should have an impact on our behaviour: there should be fruit from our faith. Can people see that we are Christians because of the things we do which come from our faith in God?

How is this a fight?

There is a sense that we have a responsibility to maintain our faith (*1 Timothy 6:11*).

Timothy is already a believer and Paul is encouraging him to attain more faith. We must not rest content in the faith we have as though that is all we need, or as if it will stay there without a fight against the forces of unbelief in the ups and downs of life. Its easy to coast along and then suddenly realise that our faith has ebbed away. We need to protect our faith, feed it.

Reading the Bible and studying it invites God to speak to you day by day. Singing worship songs full of truth can focus our minds on what's good. Reading biographies of people whose faith inspires us, and explanations of what we believe. Meeting together is essential to keep going on the journey, to give and receive encouragement and help. We should do this on Sundays and in small groups, but also meeting with a friend to talk and pray can be really helpful.

When we choose to do God's will we discover more of God, if we disregard our conscience and allow sin to reign – even when that small voice is prompting us to do something different – we start to sever our conscience and our faith is also affected. Quick confession of sin and repentance keeps our consciences clear and helps us build our faith.

Paul uses other analogies to help us understand how we can fight the fight of faith in *Timothy 2:3-7*: soldiers, athletes, and farmers. Who or what is your commanding officer? Who calls the shots in your life, really? We need to run according to the rules and keep the end goal in mind, realising that we are in a marathon not a sprint. A farmer receives their reward for working hard and caring for their crops. What will be the fruit of your life?

The people listed in *Hebrews 11* as men and women of faith all had their trials, times when they got it right and times when they made mistakes. God in his mercy and grace kept forgiving and encouraged them to keep going, to fight the fight that they had been called to. It's the same for us.

A good fight

How can Paul call this a good fight? Because he knows God has already won the victory, that we are not left to fight by ourselves in our own strength, and because the result of our battling should glorify God (not us).

Questions

Are you stirring up the faith within you?

- Do you need to take some steps to fan into flame the embers of your faith? Can you make a plan and find someone to help you with it or hold you to account that you really are doing it?

Are you running the right race or have you got distracted?

- Only you can answer the question of what your heart is seeking after: others can see the fruit of that but it needs you to change it. Is God challenging you to realign your life with Him, to make Him the goal?

Do you need to put down your burdens and ask God to help you in the fight?

- Are you encouraged in the faith, or have you become weary? God has promised to give us rest for our souls, and to fill us with the Holy Spirit. We can put down the things He hasn't asked us to carry.



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