

# How to Build Your Faith (Part 1)

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Grab your Bibles and open them up. We're going to go to Luke this time. This is still going to be part of our study through Matthew. We're taking a few weeks off from our verse-by-verse study of Matthew so that we might talk about how to keep your faith growing strong. For those of you that were here last week you're already clued in on this and you know what we're doing.

Luke 22 is where I want you to go. At the very tail end of last week's Matthew study, you'll remember that we were actually looking at this passage in Luke, so we're going to use it as our springboard today into what we're dealing with. It was a passage that's covered here in the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Luke, where Jesus is dealing with the disciples at the Last Supper and talking to them about what's going to be happening in the next several hours and so forth. I forgot to pray. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for being with us here today. Thank You for Your goodness and grace. We need spiritual ears. We need spiritual eyes. We need a spiritually receptive heart. That's something You give. Help us to use it today to hear Your voice. We need to hear Your voice today. I ask God for Your Holy Spirit to just find freedom to minister to hearts today, and I ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Okay. All right. Jesus is talking in this passage to His disciples. It's the Last Supper. They are dealing with the issue of what is about to take place in the next several hours, and Jesus informs them, this night, you guys are all going to run out on me. You're going to desert me. As Peter objects to that, saying, I will not run out on you. Jesus says, actually, Pete, it's even worse for you.

That is where we pick up Luke chapter 22:31, and this is what it says. Look with me in your Bible; it says:

*“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat (and we're going to talk about what that sifting process is all about and what it means, but look what I want you to notice very carefully here what Jesus said to Peter; he said) <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon (I've prayed for you, Simon. I've prayed that you don't have to go through this tough situation. He didn't say that, did He? Simon, I've prayed for you that all these people who are going to come up and challenge your faith wouldn't come to you tonight. He didn't say that either.*

Simon, I've prayed for you), *that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*”

I made the point last week and I want to reiterate it to you this week. Of all the things that Jesus could have prayed for Peter, He chose to pray for his faith. He chose to pray that his faith would not fail.

I think that's an important thing for you and I to take note of; and it is going to be, in fact, the springboard on which we launch into these next four weeks of studies through the Word of God because we're going to talk about that whole issue of keeping your faith strong when you go through hard times.

Peter was about to go through a hard time. I mean a life-altering, enormous colossal failure. He was about to fail big time. I mean, we're talking he's going to do a face plant in the mud – not once, but three times. And Jesus knows that that kind of an event in his life has the potential of absolutely devastating his faith.

People—you ever heard of this? People get to the point where they say, you know what? I'm done. I'm done. Tired of this. I'm done. I'm such a failure. I'm so disappointed. I'm so discouraged. I don't even want to go on.

Jesus knew that, so He said, Simon, I've prayed for you. I've prayed that your faith would not fail.

Now you notice what Jesus said Satan asked to do. He said, “*Satan has asked to sift you all as wheat.*” Now you may be aware of what the sifting process involves, and you might think, well, that doesn't sound like such a bad thing. I mean that's how you separate the stalk and the chaff from the wheat kernel. It's something you had to do in order to get to the real fruit of the wheat. But, if you've ever seen this sifting go on, it's actually a very violent process—and it is, literally.

When we talk about sifting wheat, we're talking about literally tearing the wheat apart because it's all growing together. It's all one thing, and it has to be literally ripped apart or torn apart in order to get to the fruit. And what Satan has asked to do is to rip the disciples apart, specifically, Peter. Satan has asked permission to rip you apart, but I've prayed for you.

I want you to know that that is Satan's m.o. He wants to tear you apart. He wants to tear you away from God's promises. He wants to tear you away from trusting in the Lord with all of your heart and leaning not on your own

understanding. He wants to tear you away from a close relationship with Jesus. That's just what Satan does.

So, Jesus prayed for Peter's faith, and here's why: because the condition of our faith is critical. Remember, last week, I put up that dopey faith meter. It wasn't real; I just put a picture of it up on the screen, and I was talking about how cool it would be if we could actually have such a thing. We're so big on monitoring all of our biological things these days. It would be cool if there was a spiritual meter that we could put on our heart or whatever, and it would tell us how healthy is your faith, and so forth. What condition is your faith in? It's a huge thing, you guys. Don't think that this is a small thing that I'm talking about.

When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica—Paul often didn't get to stay with churches nearly as long as he wanted to, because he'd get there, he'd share the Gospel, they'd raise up this beginning of a church group, and then inevitably Paul would get into trouble, and he'd have to leave town. They'd literally run him out of town. It was no less the situation in Thessalonica, and so Paul had to leave, and he would be concerned about how the believers were doing. He wrote to the church in Thessalonica, and he explained to them, I was just, I was worried sick about you guys.

But what was he worried about? Let me put this up on the screen for you so you can see. Here's what he said:

**1 Thessalonians 3:5-8 (NIV)**

*For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith.... Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

*For this reason, when I could stand it no longer (in other words, my patience ran out), I sent (Timothy to what? Find out if you guys bought that new church building? If you were able to sign that thing on that new property? Oh, I sent Timothy to find out if you got those new chairs. Did you get the, did you get the new chairs? Or did you work out that issue with the choir robes? None of that. I sent Timothy) to find out about your faith. (I wanted him to take your spiritual temperature. He says) I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. But (he says, wow, we are so relieved) Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news*

*about (what? What is he concerned about more than anything?) your faith.... Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. (And then look what he says the result of having a strong faith is:) For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

And that's the best explanation that I can come up with for what happens when your faith is in good shape. When you have a healthy faith, you're standing firm in the Lord. That is how you stand firm in the Lord: by having a strong, healthy faith/trust.

There's an Old Testament example—or statement, I guess I should say—during the time of king Ahaz, who was a contemporary of Isaiah. This passage is actually found in Isaiah, where king Ahaz was facing a military threat – and a serious one. But God came to him and said, don't be afraid. I'm going to take care of you in this thing. Not that Ahaz was necessarily a good guy; God was just being gracious. But here's what He said to Ahaz. This is fascinating. He said:

**Isaiah 7:9b**

*“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”*

*“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”*

Isn't that an interesting and rather sobering statement for God to make? If you don't stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. So, what are the things that can cause our faith to fail? What are the things that can cause us not to stand firm because our faith has been compromised or eroded?

Well, this is where it gets personal because, frankly, the things that I might struggle with in terms of threatening my faith, you guys might not even— it's not even on your radar. Do you know how personal that is? And maybe something that would send you into a tailspin wouldn't affect me at all.

We all have our buttons, and Satan is the quintessential button pusher. I don't necessarily think Satan knows exactly which buttons always to push in our lives. I think he just knows human nature pretty well, and he's been doing this for a long time. And eventually, he knows if he just keeps pushing buttons, he's going to hit on something that's going to throw you for a loop, whatever it may be, and get you to compromise your faith in some way. It's whatever brings disappointment into our lives. And there's lots of things that can do that, right? Those are the things we have to watch out for. Those are the things that we need

to expect that Satan is going to throw at us to get us to doubt the goodness of God, doubt His love for us and His working in our lives. Because he knows if he can get us disappointed and discouraged, we're that close to giving up, just throwing in the towel, just saying, "I'm done."

The Bible refers to the things that Satan throws into our life as, "*the flaming arrows of the evil one.*" Fairly descriptive phrase, isn't it? "*The flaming arrows of the evil one.*" It's actually found in the Book of Ephesians, chapter 6. And this is— I'll put it up for you, the whole thing. Let's take a look at it. Paul begins and he says:

**Ephesians 6:12-16 (NIV)**

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

*For our struggle* (or battles or challenges are) *not against flesh and blood* (that means it's really not your neighbor that's the major problem), *but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that* (look at this phrase) *when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything,* (and that means, after you have fought the battle) *to stand.*

(That's what he means. It's easy to get into a battle and be standing. What's tough is to finish the battle and still be standing – and that's what Paul is saying. I want you to put on the *full armor of God* so that when you stand, when you begin to stand in the battle, that after everything is done, you're still standing, right? So, he goes on to say,)

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this* (check this one out), *take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish* (that's an interesting word, isn't it?) *all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

What is your faith for? To “*extinguish...the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” Extinguish. Not just deflect. Extinguish. Flaming arrows. The flaming arrows—horrible thing to send someone's way. Not just an arrow. An arrow is going to do plenty of damage all on its own; but this one's on fire. Flaming arrows were obviously— if I were wanting to take a city, I could take an arrow and I could haphazardly shoot it toward a house; doesn't matter exactly what I hit, as long as I hit something that's going to burn because I've got a flaming arrow. Shoot, I can start a huge fire going.

But it is the shield of faith that Paul says here in Ephesians 6, is that which has been given to you and I, as the body of Christ, the children of God to extinguish those flaming arrows. All right.

It's a powerful tool that we've been given, but it's all predicated upon our faith and the health of our faith. Remember, I said it would be great if we could just put a meter on us. How's your faith? Is it healthy? Can you extinguish the flaming arrows of the enemy? Or are they going, sssshhhhh, dunk, and just sitting there and sizzling and burning? If your faith is not strong, if it's, in fact, compromised, you're going to find those flaming arrows doing a lot of damage, and they will continue to weaken your faith, and weaken your resolve, until eventually we get close to giving up, if not giving up altogether.

Obviously, Satan wants you to be in a weakened condition so that his flaming arrows can do what he wants them to do. Listen, this is why Peter wrote to us in 1 Peter chapter 5. He said:

**1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)**

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

And I'm here to tell you what he wants to devour is your faith. He wants to devour your faith. Remember when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians? We looked at that passage earlier. He said, I sent Timothy to find out about your faith. I was afraid that the enemy got in there and wrecked everything. I'm afraid. I was afraid that Satan got in and devoured your faith. But Timothy just came back, met us, said, you know what? Their faith is strong. So, we're good. We're good. You're good. And because you're good, we're good. That's what he said to them. It's a strong faith that stands its ground against the enemy.

So, what can you do? Last week, I advanced 4—for lack of a better word—tools that the Lord has given you and I that we might have a strong and healthy faith. And this week, we're dealing with the first one. Let me put the 4 up on the screen. They are:

- The Word
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Obedience

They are the Word of God, Prayer, Fellowship and Obedience. Today we're going to be dealing with, The Word.

Now, you probably don't have to hang around Calvary Chapel too terribly long to figure out that we put a pretty big emphasis on the Word of God. We try to limit anything else in the service that is going to distract. We want to spend time with worship; we want to spend time with the Word.

We only do announcements around here just because we feel like we have to, not because we want to. Honestly, seriously, we struggle with announcements. We sit down every Friday morning; the staff gets together and we sit down and we actually put all the same things that you see. We put them on a TV screen in our meeting room, and we go through the announcements one by one. We decide whether we need it, if we don't need it, or if it needs to be changed or whatever. We know that we have to do them, but we don't want to do them because we want to have more time for the Word of God.

We think that's very important. We always have. Whether it's a Sunday morning, a Wednesday night, whatever group meeting is going on around here—the focus is on the Word of God, and obviously for good reason: because the Word can directly build up your faith.

You know what it says in Romans 10:17? It says:

**Romans 10:17 (NASB)**

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

That means that the Word of God has a direct connection to the building up of your faith, the strengthening of your faith. And when your faith is strong, you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the enemy. You can stand, and having

done everything, stand – be standing when the thing is all said and done. All right.

Every year around December, for the last several years, we've been putting out Bible Reading plans. We're not doing it so much on paper anymore because with the with the internet becoming so widespread, Bible Reading plans are something that pretty much anybody who has internet access can take hold of. Now all we have to do is just point people in the right direction. Used to be years ago, we'd print out these long, Through the Bible little booklets, and we'd put them out, and people grab them and read through the Word.

I never know exactly how many people are taking advantage of those or anything else that we offer in the way of going through the Word on a regular basis. But I will tell you this: The ones who do inevitably come back and talk about just what an impact it's had in their life.

When they just start reading through the Bible—and it might be like just reading through the New Testament, it's like I'm going to take the New Testament in a year, or I'm going to take the whole Bible in a year, or I'm going to take the whole Bible in two years, or whatever. And they get on a reading plan, and they're just taking in the Word of God every day, little by little, maybe just two, three chapters, whatever it may be, and that's all—but it has this cumulative impact in their lives; and they just know they're healthier spiritually than when they weren't regularly consuming the Word of God. They're excited about it, and it's always fun for me to see that.

Unfortunately, getting into the Word isn't our biggest challenge. It's staying in the Word, isn't it? I mean, that's what I struggle with. It's not getting into the Word. I can open my Bible anytime. It's staying consistently in the Word of God that is the biggest issue. And frankly, that's been an issue for God's people ever since they've been God's people – even back in the Old Testament. Let me show you a passage from Deuteronomy. Look what God said to His people way back then. He said:

**Deuteronomy 11:18,20 (NIV)**

*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates...*

*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates...*

In other words, God is saying: Be creative about how you keep the Word of God in front of you. If He was saying this today to you and I, it might be something like print out that passage and put it on your bathroom mirror while you're getting ready to go somewhere; or put that on the dashboard of your car; or get your mp3 player, and when you're out for the walk, be listening to My Word, and so forth and so on. We have so many ways of getting into the Scripture today.

Sue still has been actually committing more Scripture to memory this year. Most of you know that she's going to India in October. They've been encouraging a lot of reading and a lot of Scripture memorization—and encouraged all the people going to India to memorize an entire chapter of the Bible. She chose Romans chapter 12, and so she just printed it out, and takes it on her walk every day. I mean, every day. So, if you see her out walking with a piece of paper, she's got the Scripture in her hand, and she's memorizing that chapter from the Bible over and over again. It's such a wonderful way.

God just says: Get creative. He said in the Old Testament here, “*bind them on your forehead*” and write them on, tie them onto your hand. Do you know the Jews took that literally? I mean, they went around with little headbands with a little box attached to it, and there were little tiny scrolls inside the box, and looked really dopey, and he'd walk around with this stuff hanging on him and stuff.

You can have the Word of God literally hanging on you and really not get it in your heart. The first thing God said here in Deuteronomy was, bind My Word to your heart. Let it in; allow the Word of God to be assimilated. So many times, our reading of the Word of God is just this quick: I got to read through my chapters for today, and boom, I'm done. Whatever.

Satan loves that. He loves it when the Word isn't really getting into our hearts; we're slacking off. Now there's going to be—and he knows there's going to be that subtle but constant erosion to our faith that will make us more susceptible to the fiery arrows that he sends our way, and we become more vulnerable.

I've asked myself the question: Why is it that Christians don't make feeding on the Word of God daily the priority that it should be? Why do we slack off? Think about that for a minute. The only answer I could come up with is that we really don't truly believe that it matters that much. Because I've noticed something about human nature: what we think matters, we take time to do. I mean, we're passionate about what we value. We take time to do it. And if that means going out and washing your car, then you're going to make sure that gets

done, or whatever is important to you. What we need to do is we need to be convinced anew and afresh that keeping our faith healthy is vital.

I want to remind you— what did Jesus pray regarding Peter? That his faith would not fail. What does that tell you? That this is critical, you guys. It is critical that we have a healthy faith. Not just I'll get around to it. It is critical. I mean, the situation often is that we're just on cruise because we're really not under that much stress. I like to liken our lives to a bridge that is full of stress fractures but they don't show up because what's going over the top of that bridge is just light foot traffic and maybe a few bicycles. And that bridge can be badly made and never really show its bad workmanship.

Unfortunately, you and I are broken vessels. You know that, right? But that broken vessel doesn't really show itself until there's real stress that is applied to that vessel. And just like a bridge, suddenly the big heavy trucks start rolling over the top of it, guess what, those stress fractures are going to show themselves, and that is the time that you and I decide it's probably time to start getting into the Word.

And what sounds weird to you about that? I mean, how many soldiers do you know are getting used to using their implements of warfare when the battle is already raging? We pull out the sword of the Spirit, and oh boy, we're not even sure how to swing this thing. We're not really strong enough to swing it, and yet the battle is raging all around us. But this is the time we've picked to just get used to the sword of the Spirit and start swinging it around – and we wonder why we find ourselves laid out flat on our back.

We need to be convinced that we need to be in the Word daily. We need to be convinced.

But next, we also need to seek out the best way that works for you. Now this is an important thing. This is the personalization of this whole process. I'm willing to bet that there are a good number of you who've tried getting into the Word in the past, but you've failed miserably because you probably just started reading the Bible; you said, okay, I'm going to do this. I'm going to start reading the Bible, and I'm going to go from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis was pretty interesting, and Exodus was pretty interesting. And then, you got to Leviticus; you waded through Leviticus. Then you got to Numbers; and about that time, you started thinking, I'm not getting this stuff. And you basically just put your Bible aside and figured, I'll just come to church, and that'll be the way I get the Word of God.

Problem is, church happens at best for most of you twice a week, most of you once a week, and actually the majority of you less than once a week, to be completely honest with you. Now what's going on? You're not getting that daily food anymore, are you? What would happen physically if you just stopped eating? What if you ate once a month, twice a month. Even if you ate once a week, you'd still be in a weakened condition. You need that daily sustenance of God's Word.

But here's the problem. We try to do it like somebody else does it. Somebody goes, well, I just started reading through the Bible and I made it through in a year." And we think, "Well, okay, I guess that's what I need to do, and we think we just got to gut our way through the thing.

Guys, be creative. Be creative about what you do, when you do it, and how you do it. What works best for you? Some of you guys are great sitting down in your favorite chair, opening your Bible and reading it. But you know what? I know some of you; you cannot sit still that long. Well, don't! Get your headphones on, get your mp3 player, put Scripture on there, or print out what you need, and go! Listen to the Word of God, hear the Word of God. That's the important thing – that you're getting a constant influx of the Word of God. We have so many ways to do it these days.

Sue is funny. My wife, when she's reading through the Scripture, there's some Books that she'll put off and put off until—like I'm talking Job. When's the last time you read through Job, like in a sitting? It's like, oh God, just shoot me now. I mean, Job can be a challenging book to get through. Well, she picks times like when she's like repainting a room to take the Book of Job and play it from her phone or tablet or something like that, or computer, and listen to it while she's painting. She goes through the entire Book of Job doing this other sort of a thing. It's great. She hears the whole thing and she's feels like she's getting something else done, but she's absorbing. And some of you guys who are good listeners, that's a great way to get the Word of God in your heart.

Let me tell you this: We have gone—we have bent over backwards right even here at Calvary Chapel to make sure that our website is a way for you to continue to get the Word of God and the constant teaching of the Scripture. Did you know that we have all 66 Books of the Bible on our website with me teaching through, talk about boring, right? But yeah, all 66 Books.

Maybe you're not familiar with even going to our website. Basically, it looks like this.



I've highlighted in red the links: We have a menu across the top and the one I've put a box around up at the top says, Through the Bible and then down below there's an icon that says, Through the Bible Studies. Click on either one of those, it'll take you to literally all 66 Books of the Bible. And then you click on a Book and it brings up every study, and you can either listen to them or you can watch the service in most cases.

Some of them don't have video, but do you know that we've also made it possible for you to be able to download those? You can download any one of our studies. You click on the study; it'll bring up a window and there's a little line there that says, Download. You can bring it to your computer, listen to it later on, put it on your mp3 player, put it on your phone.

Be listening to the Word of God. Be hearing the Word of God. How many of you have time on your way to work to listen to a study? Or maybe you can get through half of it on the way there and half on the way back. Or it might take you a week to get through a study. Who cares? It's just that during that drive time, you're getting the Word of God in your heart – and that is the important thing, because God's Word is so readily available.

But remember, people, we don't stop with listening. Remember the exhortation of James, from James chapter 1:

**James 1:22-24**

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*

We read that, and we think how's that possible for somebody to be so stupid that they walk away from a mirror and go, now, where was my nose again? That's not what he's actually saying. He's relating to the Word of God as a mirror because that's the function it portrays for you and I.

Do you know that every time you and I look into the Word of God, we see a reflection of who we are? Who we really are. And often it's not a very pretty reflection – just like, when, like in my stage of life, you get older and you look in the mirror and scare yourself. But, when I look into the mirror of God's Word, I see all the warts and wrinkles that I have, spiritually speaking.

Now, that's called the conviction, by the way of the Holy Spirit. Through God's conviction, He says, my child, I love you with an everlasting love, but this is who you are, and this is what you look like. And it is up to you and I to respond to what He says. If I simply close my Bible and say, okay, we're good; what's for dinner? Is there a football game on this afternoon? Or whatever what have I done? It's just like, James says, looking in a mirror, walking away, forgetting what you look like. Because when you look in the Bible and you see what you look like from God's visual perspective, and then you don't do anything about it, it's just like forgetting.

And that's what Sunday mornings are about. I got to be honest with you, I've often thought the way we do church on a Sunday morning is probably—I mean, if the apostle Paul said in one of our services, he'd go, what are you guys doing? That's not the way we did church. First of all, we met for about 4 or 5 hours, and have you given people the opportunity to respond? So many times, on a Sunday morning, you can come to church, you can hear the Word, there's that conviction, yeah, Lord, we close in prayer, and it's just like I'm on my way

heading on to the next thing, didn't really take the time to think about or apply what God said.

And that whole process of applying, I don't think we can begin to put too much emphasis. Do you remember what Jesus said about this? It's given to us in Luke chapter 6. Here's what it says. He says:

**Luke 6:47-49 (NIV)**

*I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*

(Listen) *I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, (why?) because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground (or the sand, if you will) without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, (boom) it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*

That's a sobering passage; and I don't think there's probably any better word-picture in the Bible that describes the difference between a healthy faith and a weak faith. What does your healthy faith enable you to do? Withstand the torrents of life, the fiery arrows of the evil one. When your faith is weak, those things just take you down. I think the key here, obviously, is doing what the Word says.

Now, along those lines, I want to share with you, if I could, something that we're going to be doing differently on our Wednesday night studies. I don't know how many of you have an opportunity to get out on Wednesday nights, but we're starting our Wednesday nights back up here in September 4<sup>th</sup>. We took the summer off because we were doing our summer growth workshops, which by the way, were great. We loved them. They did well.

But anyway, as I was praying about and talking to my wife about how our Wednesday night services went, I was really dissatisfied with the way we've been doing things because, basically, it's a few songs of worship, and then I

would get up and teach for about an hour, and then we'd close in prayer and we leave.

The Lord has been speaking a word to me lately, and it's the single word, discipleship, making disciples. And I got to thinking about the best way that I could do that and how we could change things on a Wednesday night.

Starting this first Wednesday in September, we're going to have about 15 minutes of worship when we get here from about 7:00 to around 7:15, and then I'm going to teach – but I'm going to teach for about 30 minutes. I'll go from about 7:15 to 7:45. And then after that, you will all those of you who come, be given a handout, like a half-sheet handout, which will include questions, things to think about, things to write down about the study. And then it will include specific prayer points and questions about how you can apply what you've just heard. And then, after you've done that for about 15 to 20 minutes, whether you're in a group or by yourself – it doesn't matter, we'll have the worship team come back up, and we'll end the night with a little bit more worship, which will be predicated around a response opportunity.

But that's what I'm feeling very strongly that the Lord would have us to do on Wednesdays so that we're not just hearing the Word of God, so that we are taking an opportunity to put into practice what the Word of God has to say. It's obviously very vital. I think I've shown you here today why it is so important. Some changes coming down the pike here, and God has given you and I the Word of God to strengthen our faith. Let's use it.

Let's stand together. Let's take some time this morning here just to pray because I'm fairly convinced that the Holy Spirit, being who He is, being as faithful as He is, I'm willing to bet He's probably done a work of conviction in various hearts here today.

And if that's you, don't get bummed out. Just respond and tell the Lord, busted, I need You. I need You. I need You every day in my life. I need Your Word every day in my life, and I need to be applying Your Word every day in my life. But I need You, Lord, be gracious to me.

I've been telling the Lord lately, as I've been going on my walk in the morning, I've just been telling the Lord, Lord, my heart is so prone to wandering. You know I need You every day.