

Developing Strong Faith

Building Core Strength

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Bible Text: Luke 1:35-49

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Well, many of us are still trying to process the terrible events that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut just a little over a week ago. I was reading about a pastor who told of being there with the families in a nearby fire house and they were bringing their children back to be reunited with their parents and one by one they would just rejoice as those parents were united and then there was the terrible reality that some parents were being ushered into another room, because their names had not been previously called and there would be no reunion for them that day.

He spoke about one mom who earlier that morning had told him how excited she was that her daughter was going to be an angel in the church's Christmas program. That same day her little life was taken. For another mother who was being consoled and the her cell phone off with a reminder that later she needed to pick up her son from school and take him to cub scouts, a reminder that was no longer necessary.

It takes you all the way back to the Garden of Eden when our adversary uttered his first recorded lie when he told Eve that in King James parlance, "You will not surely die." And the apostle Paul would later explain:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men."¹

Sometimes the truth of that verse comes screaming out in living Technicolor and the pain and the terror of that reality is felt by an entire nation, unspeakable grief.

But as often is the case in a time like that, there are corresponding stories of unbelievable heroism where human beings make choices to sacrifice themselves to try to protect others and in ways that, to a degree, offset the evil that was done. Like the example of Vicky Sodo, a 27 year old teacher whose family reports that she liked to refer to her first grade students as her angels. When she heard the gunman in the school she hit her children in closets and cabinets. A local police officer said she was found protecting her kids, doing

¹ Romans 5:12.

instinctively what she knew to do, not protecting herself or putting her own safety above that of her children, she was found having given her life for her children.

Or the principal of the school Dawn {?}. She had just led the school to install and implement several new security measures and methods last summer. Dawn was coming out of an administrative meeting that morning when she heard shots. And the evidence at the scene appears to indicate that she was running toward the gunman when she was killed. Think about that, running towards the gunman when she was killed in the midst of unspeakable evil.

And there was also incredible strength. That is what we have been talking about this Christmas season, the issue of quiet strength, because the birth of Christ was anything but loud. It was anything but flamboyant. It was anything but flashy. But it was certainly strong, strong in a myriad of ways, but quiet strength. And the question we have been asking ourselves is: Am I becoming a stronger person? Not physically, but in my soul. And that is the point of this verse that we have been using as part of our theme all year, Psalm 138:3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”²

Many of the events of Christmas can help us take additional steps on that very path. This morning we want to study the lives of two women in the Bible and we are going to think about the issue of developing strong faith, because if there is anything about us that we need to be strong and getting stronger, it is our faith. But how do we practically make that happen?

With that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Luke chapter one. and if you are new to studying the Bible or maybe you don't even have one, just pull out that one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the back section to the New Testament to page 43 and that will bring you to Luke chapter one this morning.

And I realize that some of you may be studying the specific biblical details about the birth of Christ for the very first time and if that is your situation this morning I want you to know we are very glad that you are here. In fact, we ran that ad in the paper this week a couple of time especially to attract people to these services today and tomorrow night who might not even have a church home. And so if that is where you are coming from this morning, I don't want you to feel out of place in any way at all. I want you to feel like someone that we really wanted to have come. And I think one of the ways that I show that is while we study a passage of Scripture like this we make sure that we are giving enough background information so even someone who is brand new to studying the Bible can get this and can understand what God would be saying to you from this passage of Scripture.

² Psalm 138:3.

So right now I am going to read the story of Mary and Elizabeth and you might say, "Well, I don't know who either of those people are." You will get it before the hour is up. How is that?

Luke chapter one beginning in verse 26.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."³

Don't you love that? Both Mary and Elizabeth are women who developed strong faith. And with the time we have remaining let's think about three characteristics of that kind of strength in two very outstanding women.

First of all quiet strength takes God at his word. That is what faith is, choosing to take God at this word. And neither Mary nor Elizabeth would have done what they did or said what they said were it not for their willingness to believe some rather outrageous sounding promises that God had made to them. Now we are going to get to the details of

³ Luke 1:26-45.

that in minute, but maybe it would be best to put that thought, the importance of faith into the overall sweep of the Word of God, because here is what we learn. God always calls upon people to come to him by faith. Forget about that coming to him with your works like you are going to be able to earn your way to heaven. Forget all of that. If you are going to come to God you have to come to him by faith.

That is why we read in a verse like Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”⁴

Or this important theological text, Romans 5:1:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵

Or Hebrews 11:6:

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him.”⁶

Or this crucial text, Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves,⁷ it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.⁷

That is one of the biggest misconceptions going, that it is the duty of man to earn his way to heaven by his own good works, by doing enough good to merit eternal life on his own. And that is what the average American thinks who has not studied his or her Bible, that God is going to have some sort of heavenly scale and he is going to weigh up my bad and then weigh out my bad and hopefully my good is going to outweigh my bad and I am going to earn my way to heaven by what I did. Wrong. Such thinking is the polar opposite of the gospel, friends. And that is why this church puts so much emphasis on encouraging men and women to carefully study their Bibles, because Christianity 101 is all about understanding that if you are going to have a relationship with God that is real, it starts not by doing certain things, but by believing certain things.

More about that in a moment. It is a matter of faith.

Let's even back up logically one step, just to be sure that we are clear about all of this. One of the fundamental questions that every human being has to answer is: Do you

⁴ Galatians 2:20.

⁵ Romans 5:1.

⁶ Hebrews 11:6.

⁷ Ephesians 2:8-9.

believe you have enough grey matter between your ears to answer every question and solve every dilemma? Do you? Please tell me the answer to that is no. I hope it is. We are going to have to widen the door to help you get that head of yours out.

Well, think about that, though. What is the corollary? You have to decide who you are going to believe. You have to decide who you are going to trust. You have to decide who you are going to follow. And the God of heaven and earth is saying, “Choose to believe and follow me. Choose to believe and follow my Word even when it is hard, because nothing is impossible with God.”

Now what do we learn when we try to concentrate on this story of Mary and Elizabeth in that context? It is some really good news, because here it is, that God often provides evidence to help us believe him. See, we are not talking this morning about blind faith. We are not talking about syrupy sentimentality that has no evidence. Biblical faith is always choosing to take God at his Word. That is why Paul said in Romans 10:17:

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”⁸

And people are forever asking us, “Now what is the secret to church growth and blah, blah, blah?”

There is no secret. It is all about proclaiming the Word of God. And I am glad for passionate worship. We want to be A+ in that, but this church has always been and will always be about passionately proclaiming the Word of God, no frills, no gimmicks, the Word, because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

And that is what we see unfolding in this passage, God giving evidence to people, giving them his Word and encouraging them to believe. You have the conception of John the Baptist.

Now I said a moment ago that I would explain some of these details in case it is not familiar to you or just to remind all of us of how great God is. So let’s think about the details. First of all, who was Elizabeth? Well, that was explained earlier in the chapter in the verses that I didn’t read. The book is written by Luke. Luke is a medical doctor and he is a man who researched carefully the events about the birth, death and resurrection of Christ and then wrote the gospel of Luke, first and foremost, to his friend Theophilus. And we don’t know for sure exactly even who he is. We think he was probably a governmental leader, perhaps a cultural leader of some kind, but all that is explained in the first couple of verses of this book and then Luke introduces us to a priest. His name is Zacharias and was married to a woman named Elizabeth. She is one of the women we are talking about this morning.

And the Scripture tells us this, that Zacharias and Elizabeth were, in Bible speak, advanced in years. That is a nice way of saying old. Some of you, frankly, are advanced in years and I am not going to point fingers and please don’t point them back, but that is

⁸ Romans 10:17.

the what the Bible says about them. And it also tells us this. They had no child because Elizabeth was barren. And we learn later, by the way, in this passage how powerful that was and I realize that there are some in our church family who have struggled with that or are struggling with it right now. But it is interesting. After Elizabeth learns that God is going to give them a baby in their old age, here is what he says... what she says. This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked with favor upon me. Hear this, to take away my disgrace. Isn't that tender? To take away my disgrace.

Well, I am getting ahead of the story a little bit, because Luke explains that Elizabeth's husband Zacharias as a priest is chosen for the great honor to enter the temple and burn incense on behalf of the people of God. And so all the other people, all the other worshippers are waiting outside for him to come out and he is delayed. And what they don't know is the reason he is delayed is because an angel appears to him and tells him that they are going to have a son in their old age. But that is not the big news. What the angel says is that their son, John the Baptist, is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah as prophesied in the last couple of verses of the book of Malachi. Therefore, what that means is that the Messiah is coming.

Now what happens next, I think, is evidence of the reliability of the Bible, because God does not airbrush the sins of his people out of Scripture, because Zacharias in his interaction with the angel the man, the religious leader, the one who should have been out front in believing whatever it was that God had revealed to him, he chose to doubt God.

Here is a little note to self. If an angel ever shows up and tells you something, it would really wisest just to go ahead and believe him quickly instead of saying something back like, "Seriously. Did you know I am old? Did you know that my wife is like way old?"

That will get you in trouble, too, people, by the way. In fact, if you are going to respond to the promises of God in your life like that, I would encourage you to stop by Meyer on the way home and pick up a legal pad and a pen. And if you know your Bible you know why I would say that, because Zacharias is judged in this chapter, is he not, because of his unbelief and he is therefore unable to speak audibly until John the Baptist his son, nine months later, the forerunner of the Messiah, in fulfillment of the last couple of verses of the last book of the Old Testament is born. And we also learn, by the way, that this Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife was related to Mary. Well, obviously they were a significant difference in age, but they were related and many teachers of Scripture believe that they were cousins.

But here is the larger point. Go back to what we are really talking about especially. God gives evidence to help his people believe his Word. Now how do we know that is true from this particular passage? Here is part of it. It is the response of John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb to the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb. Seriously, do you think any human being would have ever come up with that tale? The response of John the Baptist in his mother's womb to the presence of Jesus in his mother's womb. And, remember, this is a doctor telling the story and he is writing to a sophisticated leader of the day and Theophilus can take it or leave it and so can you and I. But the Scripture makes it clear.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby, John the Baptist leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth emphasizes it later.

"For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy."⁹

And I realize some of you might say, "Well, are you seriously expecting us to believe in this technologically day and age in which we live that something of eternal significance actually occurred in a mother's womb?"

Of course you ought to believe that. Why would they have lied? What possible benefit would there have been for them to have made up this tale? And also remember this. Luke is writing relatively late. This is right before the persecution of Nero. That means that it is becoming more and more costly to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Why would doctor Luke give this information that he had researched to his friend Theophilus if he was simply going to risk his life on something that he did not believe was true.

So this is one of the signs God used to make it easier to believe that nothing is impossible with him. And I realize you might say this morning, "Well, this actually makes it harder for me to believe."

Sure, if your God is about the same size as you, but if he is a God sized God, wouldn't you expect him to be able to do God sized things for the purpose of making it easier for you to believe in him? And, by the way, in case you are saying to your wife right now, "This is whacked, Helen. Why did we come?" This is not the first time something of eternal consequence began being played out in a mother's womb. See, God knows all about that. Psalm 139 says he knows what is happening even in the womb. This is not the first time something of... before you reject the Bible, you ought to know what it says. This is not the first time something of eternal consequence was played out in a mother's womb.

You say, "Oh, seriously."

I can prove that with one question. Are you ready? Here it is. How is that Middle East peace process working out? Do you sense we are right on the verge of making progress on that one? As soon as John Kerry is confirmed do you think it is probably going to be worked out in the first quarter of next year? Seriously, how is that Middle East peace process working out? And when and where did that problem start? You ought to know the answer to that question. When and where did the Middle East peace problem start?

Here is the answer, 4000 years ago. Where? In a mother's womb. That is right. Here it is, Genesis 25:21:

Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren;
and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the

⁹ Luke 1:44.

children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."¹⁰

And who were those two little children? Jacob and Esau, the forefathers of the Jews and the Arabs. And what reason would anybody living? Think about this, 4000 years ago. What reason would anybody living in Isaac's day have to make that kind of a prediction about a mother who was about to give birth to twins? And who could possibly make that prediction and bring it to pass in such an amazing way that that promise is being as powerfully fulfilled today 4000 years later than ever before? Who could do that? Here is the answer. God, the God of heaven and earth, the God of the universe, the God of the Bible who gives people like you and me all sorts of reasons to believe in him.

And if you say, "Well, I am going to reject his Word anyway. I am not going to be a person of faith. I am not going to believe him," well, what would God say about me? You really want the answer to that question? And if you are going to get mad at this verse, you are going to have to higher up the chain than me, ok? But here you go. Try this on. In Psalm 14:1:

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"¹¹

You say, "Why did you put that verse up on Christmas?"

Here is why, it is because I have been in the ministry long enough to know that some people need it right between the eyes. Some people are plumb stubborn. You know, I am not talking about you. I am talking about, well, your cousin down the road, but I am just telling you right now. Some are stubborn and they need to come to the church house and they need to celebrate the birth of Christ, but they also need to think seriously about if this is true what response that would necessitate in me.

Well, thankfully neither Elizabeth nor Mary were fools, huh? Instead they both took God at his Word. For example, you have Mary.

"Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah..."¹²

Et cetera. Now why did she do that? Some people have taken this position. Here is what the liberals say about this particular part of the text. Well, Mary was leaving town because of shame. Seriously? She just became pregnant within a couple of days and I am not a I know what it is like to be pregnant expert, but I do know this. It takes a while before you are showing, ok? We got that? I am not going to go into the details. We also

¹⁰ Genesis 25:21-23.

¹¹ Psalm 14:1.

¹² Luke 1:39.

know from the Scripture that she came back from Elizabeth's house three months later. So if she was leaving town because of shame, why in the world would she have gone back when she would have just started to show? Friends, the reason Mary went quickly was to rejoice with her cousin Elizabeth about the fact that God had blessed her with a child. It was a sign. And, please understand. Mary did not know that Elizabeth was pregnant. It was not like she read it on Facebook. She learned that fact from this angel and as soon as the angel told her, "Your older cousin Elizabeth who has been barren all of her life, she is now expecting a baby." Bam. Immediately Mary believed that and she acted on it.

That is what we mean by quiet faith. The angel tells Mary that she as a virgin is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, that her child is going to be Messiah, that her older relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age because nothing is impossible with God and here is Mary's response. All right, then. There it is. All right, then. I better get busy and buy a shower gift and make the four day trip to her house because if that is what God says has happened, I am going to take him at his Word.

See, she agreed with the angel. She agreed with the angel. Nothing is impossible with God. And that is exactly what Elizabeth did. What Elizabeth said... remember, Elizabeth is six months pregnant with John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah and Mary, her younger relative enters the room just having found out that she was pregnant and what Elizabeth said is fascinating, because the focus on Elizabeth's part is not the difficulty of her pregnancy. Remember, she has now carried John the Baptist for six months as an older woman. There is nothing about the difficulty of all of that. There is not even any focus at all about how wonderful it is that the baby that she, Elizabeth, is carrying is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah in direct fulfillment of the final verses of the Old Testament. Elizabeth's faith is focused squarely on the fact that the Messiah is in the room.

Luke 1:42:

"And she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'"¹³

See, the focus wasn't on her, though her story was amazing. It wasn't even on her son, though John the Baptist had a role to play. God's Word is about to come together in a fascinating way and Elizabeth understood that. Blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Thank the Lord for women of quiet strength, huh, who are willing not take God at his Word. And I have told you all this this morning to basically bring you to this place logically, to be able to ask you this. What is God asking you to believe in his Word during this particular season of your life? And are you doing so? There it is. What is God asking you to believe at this particular season of your life and are you doing so?

¹³ Luke 1:42.

I am sure there will be people who are hearing this sermon this morning who the fact of the matter is they have been around the gospel, they have heard about the good news of Jesus Christ, but for whatever reason they have not yet been willing to repent and believe in him. And, friend, I want to encourage you during this Christmas season to cross the line of faith, to choose to admit your need. I know that is hard for us as proud, independent Americans, but to choose to admit your need of a Savior and a Lord and to repent and place your faith and trust in him, because if you are going to have a relationship with God that comes solely on the basis of faith founded on the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian, let me ask you this. What is next for you? What is the next step that God wants you to believe? What is now? What is hard for you to believe? And what would your life look like in the coming days if you were more like these courageous women in the Bible that we are studying this morning? What is the next thing God wants you to believe in his Word? And what is the next step that he wants you to take and are you willing to do that?

Now let's push it another step further. Quiet strength acknowledges the depth of one's need. I mean Elizabeth isn't strutting around like she is all that and a bag of chips. No, she comes humbly. She knew she needed a Lord. How has it happened to me, she says to Mary, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?

It is interesting. There are four people in this room. But everybody's attention, literally, is on the Messiah. And the principle is this. The stronger you acknowledge Jesus as your rightful Lord, the more willing you are to place your faith in his Word even when it is hard and act on it.

I hope you would be able to point to examples even this week where you were in a difficulty and your flesh wanted you to go in a particular direction and your natural bent was to go in a particular direction, but you knew that would be contrary to the Word of God and because you have concluded that Jesus is your Lord, you chose to follow his Word even when it was hard. And so you really wanted to rage out at that person, but you know that is not what your Lord says in his Word about the way you are supposed to handle your anger. So you follow Jesus as your Lord even when it was hard. You took the next step of faith.

Or you thought about a particular conflict that you were involved in and you wanted to clam up or you wanted to gossip or you want to do the pity party thing or the drama queen or whatever it was. But then you thought about the fact that, wait a minute, Jesus has given me principles of resolving conflicts in his Word and I have said that Jesus is my Lord. And I don't want to go back and communicate and I don't want to go back and acknowledge my part of the fault and I don't want to go back with the goal of pleasing God. I don't want to go back to the goal of ministering grace to the person who hears.

But God's Word says I should and Jesus is my Lord and so I am going to forget all the stuff I want and I am going to start following him. I am going to take a step of faith even when it is hard.

Or I have a particular role in the home that I would like to play as a child, as a teenager, as a mom, as a dad, but then I have clear truth from the Word of God that articulates an entirely different way to function in the home. And, because Jesus is your Lord, boss, in charge, you chose to exercise faith in what God would have you to do.

I am so glad we have just come through a great season of serving in our church. We had all sorts of opportunities to proclaim the gospel and I am thankful for the many men and women in this church who said, "Listen, it is not easy. It is not convenient, but Jesus is my Lord. And so I want to serve him and I want to proclaim the good news of Christ and be part of our church doing that even when it is difficult." And you did that by faith. Thank you for viewing Jesus in that way.

Think about the year that our church has just experienced. We had over 200 people stand up right there in that part of the church and give testimony to the fact that they had trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, a lot of them by believer's baptism. What were they doing by that act? They were saying, "I want to walk by faith. I want to identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. I want this church and I want this community to know that I have come to God by faith and by faith alone."

I thank the Lord for men and women who have chosen to be like Mary, chosen to be like Elizabeth, demonstrating strong faith.

Now I realize you might say, "And let me tell you, though, Steve, I am stuck. The next thing God wants me to do, I have known about it for a long time. It is clear in his Word. It is obvious in the circumstances, but I am stuck and the reason I am stuck and the reason I am not being like Mary and the reason I am not being like Elizabeth, the reason I am not moving forward is because that one would be a big one. That one would be a hard one and I am concerned because I have got the adversary pushing against me. So I am just kind of like stuck."

Let's talk about that. Don't fail to factor in the importance of the Holy Spirit in all of this. Prior to the New Testament Church and the passage we are talking about right now, he is all over this text. John the Baptist will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet where? In his mother's womb. The Holy Spirit is active in his life. And Mary the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." Same is true with Elizabeth.

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁴

¹⁴ Luke 1:41.

And what I am trying to say is the entire passage is filled with the Holy Spirit empowering ordinary people to demonstrate extraordinary faith. And if you are in a situation where you say, “The next step that God wants me to take according to his Word is hard,” don't fail to factor in the power of the Holy Spirit helping you to do hard things.

In fact, Jesus said this. People like us, we are in a better position than Mary, Elizabeth, in this case Thomas. You have seen me, you believed. Blessed are they who did not see people like you and me, but who believed anyway. And the fact is we can have a relationship with the Holy Spirit as part of the New Testament Church because of the gospel and because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ that is better than anyone we have talked about this morning. The Holy Spirit now seals us, if you have trusted Christ. He baptizes us the moment we trust him. He fills us. He gifts us and as a result of that he is active.

The Holy Spirit today is convicting people of their need and you might say, “I know the next step of faith God wants me to take is to talk to my friend about Christ. It is to talk to my loved one about Christ.” But you have been stuck. You have not crossed the line. Friend, you have depreciated the power of the Holy Spirit of God who stands ready to be part of that conversation and do things that will appear supernaturally because that is exactly what they are. He calls people to Christ. That is his job, to glorify Christ. He empowers us to believe and he empowers us to obey. That is why as we are walking by faith, we are walking by the Holy Spirit. And if you are serious about following Jesus as your Lord the Spirit will give you strength to understand and obey him. That is why Jesus said if anyone is willing to do his will, he will know the teaching. God will give you the truth. God will give you the strength to obey him, to take the next step of faith in your life even when it is hard.

You say, “But what about Satan?” We got that? The adversary thing going on.

Listen, would you stop putting so much attention on him? Here is what John said about that, 1 John 4:4:

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”¹⁵

In fact, I don't know if you liken commercials played during football games to spiritual truth, you really ought to. Here is a commercial that helps you understand the way you ought to think about Satan. Satan is the lion. You are the antelope in case you don't get it. Here you go.

[music]

Look who is back?

Again?

¹⁵ 1 John 4:4.

It is embarrassing.

We can see you, Carl.

We can totally see you.

Come on, you are better than this, all that prowling around?

Yeah, you are the king of the jungle.

Have you thought about going vegan, Carl?

You know, folks who save hundreds of dollars by switching to Geico sure are happy.

How happy are they, Jimmy?

Happier than an antelope with night visions goggles.

Nice.

Get happy. Get Geico.

There it is.

Fifteen minutes could save you 15 percent or more.

Here is what I am saying. Don't be all wound up about Satan. You are like an antelope with night vision goggles. In fact, the next time Satan is in your life. The next time you are worried about that, say, "Have you considered being a vegan, Satan?"

I love that line.

Aren't you glad for examples in the Bible of women of quiet strength? And aren't you glad for examples in your life of people who have demonstrated quiet faith? Strong faith? Have you had them in your life? I sure did. On a previous service there sits my mom. My mom grew up in a family of 16 brothers and sisters. She, through vacation Bible school, heard about Christ and trusted him as Savior and Lord. She started going to church by herself. And she learned about baptism and so the leaders of the church came to her home one night and explained to my mom's parents, my grandparents about that and my mom's parents said, "Well, you can be baptized, but we are not going to go."

So my mom had to decide on that particular Sunday night her parents wouldn't go, neither would any of her brothers and sisters go with her. My mom walked to church that night by herself and followed the Lord in believer's baptism. And it is amazing how

much spiritual impact my mom has been able to have on her family as a result of being a woman of faith.

I think of my mother-in-law. You will never hear me tell a mother-in-law joke for a lot of reasons, but one of them is because I have a very, very godly, delightful mother-in-law who cares for my wife, Chris' sister Karen who has been a quadriplegic now for 30 years. And my mother-in-law has faithfully cared for Karen in their home all those years yet is a delightful, joyful woman. I have never once heard her complain about that. And I am glad that God has surrounded me with women like that. I am thankful for my own wife Chris who has served our family and delights in having our son Andrew who is a delight to our family and I am glad for the fact that the noise that I frequently hear our home the most when I come into the room is laughter, because they are laughing with each other in joy. That is a woman of faith.

I am delighted that my daughters were all home together for Christmas having a great time. In fact, Liam was in the house, my grandson. But I am so delighted that my daughters are growing up in the Lord. I understand more of what John meant when he said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth." And I would just say that if you have a person around you who is like Mary, who is like Elizabeth, thank God for that, because it does. It encourages other people as they believe. And that is what Elizabeth did. She said to Mary, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

And you might say, "Well, ok, pastor Viars, I get it. I know some of the next steps of faith that I need to take. I get it, but what about the people at Sandy Hook?"

I mentioned last week that we knew of a pastor who pastors in that very city, Newtown Bible Church. He contacted us this week. And he asked for a series of resources based on the Word of God that we have in our resource center. And I am so glad for our pastor Green who is responsible. We will send you everything you need right away. Don't worry about the money. We will be more than happy to send those resources to you. And here is a faithful pastor in the midst of a group of grieving people who they are looking for the truth of God's Word even in the midst of unspeakable grief, because they know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.