

Fil-Am Community Church**WINNING GOD'S WAY****Pastor Rolly Estabillo****27 Feb 2011**

For the person who would win in life, there are two forbidden words- quit and cannot. The greatest men and women in history have invariably been persons who never quit, who never said "I cannot." They have not all been highly educated or particularly skilled or talented. What set them apart? They have all been persons of faith and perseverance.

The world is filled with talented people who are total failures. There are multitudes of educated derelicts. There are many brilliant persons who never make a difference. It is not necessary that you be gifted, highly educated or wealthy in order to be effective and successful. The only absolutely essential ingredients of greatness are faith and perseverance.

Jerry Falwell said, *"Your true greatness in life is not determined by your talent or wealth, as the world measures greatness, but rather by what it takes to discourage you and make you quit."*

Today, great numbers of Christians are quitting their jobs—their marriages--their service for Christ. Some are turning away from the church. Some are blaming

others-- blaming bitter circumstances-- blaming hypocrites in the church-- blaming organized religion-- **SOME ARE BLAMING GOD.**

This morning, I'd like to talk about winning. You see, the Bible compares life to a race. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that Christians should run to win the prize. The Bible also compares life to a battle. Again, the apostle Paul says that Christians need to prepare themselves by putting on the **“full armor of God.”**

I think it is accurate to picture life in these terms because our days on this earth are often a series of struggles.

Today I want to lay some groundwork by focusing on the foundational truth that, as Christians, no matter what battles we face in life----**we can win.** Amen?

So, we have reached the end of our series on Building Dynamic Faith. Next week, we're going to start a new series called “40 Days of Love”. We'll explore the different ways we can show and share our love to each other and to others in our spheres of influence. That means that our home groups will start a new study next week or the week after that. I know our home groups have not even finished the previous one. But that's all right. Perhaps, we can pick up where we left off after the “40 Days of Love.” The important thing is that we make a commitment to finish the book “Building Dynamic Faith.” Sound good to you?

So, going back to this final message on Building Dynamic Faith I hope that this is just the beginning of your journey toward a healthier and stronger faith. You see, one of the hallmarks of a dynamic faith is persisting in the midst of difficulties. It is not giving up when every fiber of your being is begging you to quit.

Quitting is always the easiest course--for the moment. But, quitting is never the right course. Yes, sometimes it seems as if the way is too hard- the hill too steep- strength is all gone. Sometimes, it seems as if everyone and everything are against you. No one is having it as tough as you. Life isn't fair.

How do we win life's battles then? How do we fight the good fight, as the apostle Paul says about himself?

Now, let me ask you to turn to Psalm 46. It is one of many passages in the Bible where life is described as a battle. So, let's read it together and see what basic strategy it contains....Read Psalm 46.

I don't know if you noticed but this Psalm gives some very unexpected advice for fighting a battle.

It says in v. 10 "Be still...." Other versions translate it as, "Cease striving..." The Hebrew here that we translate, "cease striving" or "be still" literally means "relax". It means "to let go, to let your arms down to your side....RELAX!"

So, in this verse God advises that as we see a battle on the horizon of our lives we are to respond by RELAXING. Of course....this is not our normal response to the onset of “battle”....so this advice doesn’t seem to make much sense....any time I have been involved in a struggle I have wanted to do something....

Think how vulnerable you feel when you drop your arms, you let go, you cease striving Yet, this is what God instructs us to do in this Psalm.

But God doesn’t just tell us what to do here....He doesn’t just tell us to “relax”....He also tells us HOW to relax.

He says “**Be still.....AND KNOW that I am God.**” In other words, there is something we can **KNOW** to help us cease our striving in the midst of the battles of life. There is something we can **KNOW** that will help us to relax when things get rough.

Often we respond to problems in life emotionally... based on feelings of fear and insecurity and panic....but in this Psalm, God challenges us to respond...not emotionally but cognitively...to respond on the basis of something we **KNOW**....instead of something we feel.

When we face the struggles and battles of life we may not **KNOW** how things are going to work out but this Psalm says we can be still...we cease striving...we can relax....because even though we don’t know how things are going to work out we

do know Who is going to work things out. And knowing God is better than knowing the outcomes. Amen?

Life is not good....often the battle turns against us....we do WIN some and LOSE SOME....life is fickle...good for some and bad for others...but God is always good. And we can relax in this comforting fact.

Verse one of this Psalm lists three things that we can know about God that will help you relax in the midst of any battle you will face or are facing right now.

I. FIRST, GOD IS OUR REFUGE (v.1a)

In any battle you need a safe place...a fortress where you can go to rest and recoup and think...and this text reminds us that God is that place in our daily struggles.

One of the most beautiful pictures of spiritual refuge is found in Psalm 91:4 where it says, *“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge”*

Have you ever seen little chicks hop around, chirping, pecking, doing “little chick stuff”? If the mother hen becomes aware of a predator or a threat to her offspring, she responds by lifting her wings and within seconds, all the baby chicks disappear underneath them. And then, where once there was a doting hen, now the predator

sees nothing but one mean-looking mama who just dares the enemy to take a step forward.

She is a refuge for her children.....she is their protection. Now eventually, the chicks will have to crawl out and face the real world again. But for a season, there is nothing quite like the soft shelter of those wings---the downy feathers caressing their heads, providing comfort and calming their fears. This Psalm reminds us that God delights in spreading His protective wings and enfolding His frightened, battle-weary children.

God is our refuge!...and one way that we let God be a refuge for us is to simply talk to Him about our struggles.

Psalm 62:8 says, “*Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*” That means taking the time to have a one-on-one with God.

In his book, “The God You’re Looking For”, Bill Hybels reminds us that Jesus modeled this practice of taking “time-out” from the struggles of life to find refuge under God’s wings.

Nobody before or since has faced the responsibilities, duties, and pressures that Jesus bore.....yet sometimes He would take an entire day and an entire night, grab a couple of disciples, and retreat to a safe place---a boat, the far side of a mountain, a secluded spot in the desert.

And there, Jesus would enter the refuge that His father had prepared for Him. Surrounded by safe people, Jesus could pour out His troubles to a God who would cover Him with His wings. In that place of shelter, Jesus could regroup, restore His strength, and sense of purpose, and get ready to go back into the world, working with all His might to claim it for the Father's love.

So this morning, hear the words of God's word...and remember that as you face the battles of life you can relax because God is our refuge.....

II. SECONDLY, GOD IS OUR STRENGTH (v.1b)

1 Peter 4:11 reminds us that anything we do for God we do... "*with the strength God provides.*" And this Psalm echoes this truth. God is our strength...our source of power for facing any battle of life.

I remember in the spring of 2004 I was in the Philippines with Anabel after having been invited by a pastor-friend to speak in their church and at a week-long youth camp. Speaking in church I had no problem. I have the experience. But speaking at a youth camp? That's a problem. Huge problem. Because I've never done it before and I didn't know whether I could connect with them. But, of course, I was called to preach and I couldn't say no.

I asked my friend, Pastor Rene, who came here last year and was our speaker, how many youth they were expecting. I was hoping like a maximum of 150 because that's my comfort level. And so, that's why I need a lot of prayers when we grow to

more than 150. Anyway, Pastor Rene said “About a thousand.” **I nearly died.** Suddenly, I felt sick in my stomach. But, of course, I relied on the strength of God to carry me through. I tried not to worry about it and prepared for the occasion.

However, as the day of my speaking engagement came nearer, I became more and more nervous and continued to rely on God's strength. All the time, butterflies were flying in my stomach.

Then the day of reckoning came. The point of no return. Pastor Rene picked me up at the Sta. Lucia Mall then took me to Boso-Boso in Antipolo. As we got closer to the place, my mouth began to dry and my heart was beating a bit faster than usual. Then, my friend said, “You know, you’ll speak in the evening. You’re the first speaker of the camp.” Which meant I was going to set the tone of the camp for the rest of the week! My heart was now pounding hard.

As we entered the huge campsite, where I saw hundreds of youth gathered in groups, singing, playing , doing their thing before the 6 PM start of the meeting, I wanted to quit. Then, Pastor Rene introduced me to his Senior Pastor, an American, who organized the event. He said, “So you came from America. I hope you can speak Tagalog.” I told him “of course”. He continued, “Have you spoken in a youth camp before? You know, you’ve got to connect with these kids. In the last year’s camp, they were all like doing their own thing while the preacher was speaking. Some, in fact, were noisy. You’ve to get their attention. Maybe you have

to be animated and move around the stage and so on.” I said, “Yes, I can” with a lump on my throat.

As we parted, I suddenly developed a slight case of diarrhea. So, I rushed to the bathroom and the bathroom was dark and flooded but I had to do what I had to do. Afterwards, I joined Pastor Rene for dinner and when he saw I barely touched my food, he said, “You are nervous, aren't you?” I nodded and just asked for prayer.

We were eating outside in a tent just facing the main entrance of the gymnasium where the evening's service was being held, right in front of the stage. They started with Praise and Worship but I couldn't appreciate the songs because I was all occupied with my feelings and over and over I prayed for God's strength. Then, God started to move. The Lord put some ideas in my mind to start my with something I hadn't prepared for.

So, when Pastor Rene called me to the front I started with a song, which I didn't plan to do. I told the youth all around that I was so encouraged by their worship that I wanted to continue singing. You see, the message they assigned to me was about friendship because their theme was based on Friendster which was popular then. So, I sang this old-time hit song by a band called Maria Cafra. I sang a capella. It went like this, “Kumusta mga kaibigan, ok ba kayo riyan? Sa tagal ng di pagsasama, kayo's miss na miss ko na. Kaya kami'y narito, sa piling nyo. Maghawak-hawak ng kamay at lilipad tayo ” As I sang, I stepped out of the pulpit just like what I did now and those kids were loving it and they were snapping their

fingers too. After that song, I asked a question, “What is the definition of a friend?” And that really made me connect with them as a number of them raised their hands and I was going around the gym giving them the mike.

God broke the ice for me. God’s presence was strong as I spoke. The young people were all attentive.

They were nodding their heads, smiling, making contact with my eyes. I spoke for maybe more than an hour and when I gave the invitation in the end, many stood up and went to the front to receive Jesus.

I looked at the counselors and I saw some of them in tears as they witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit in that youth camp. It was an experience I’ll never forget.

That was an internal battle I faced. Fortunately, God's power was available which I took advantage of. Psalm 46 reminds us when we face the battles of life, we shouldn't rely on our own limited strength. God's strength is at our disposal.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:19-20, *“I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side in heaven.”*

This means that we have access to God’s power as we battle our way through the struggles of life.

You see, we want to fill our lives to the brim with the weight and responsibility of our world and then carry it all on our own shoulders...when we should heed the instruction of this Psalm and relax as we rely on the power of the Spirit of God.

In fact to access His power we must RELAX....That's one thing I wasn't able to do but despite that God came through because he is faithful. Jesus said in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "*My power is made perfect in weakness....*" You see, some of us just don't know the power of Christ in our lives that we run out of gas trying to fix our lives in our own strength.

I remember the story one New Year's Day, in the Tournament of Roses parade, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit. It was out of gas.

The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas. The amusing thing was this float represented the Standard Oil Company. With its vast oil resources, its truck was out of gas.

Often, Christians neglect their spiritual maintenance, and though they are "clothed with power" (Luke 24:49) find themselves out of gas.

So Psalm 46 reminds us that we can relax even in the midst of the battles of life ... we can cease striving....because God is our refuge...our strength and ...

3. THIRDLY, GOD IS OUR HELP (v.1c)

In other words, He doesn't leave when tough times come. Verses 7 & 11 of this Psalm both affirm that. *"The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."*

So you can relax because you can know that God doesn't leave you when life goes in the ditch. When the battle rages, He doesn't cop out and run away. In fact He is very near to us in times of trouble.

The Bible says that we can trust God to help us in times of trouble because he is faithful. He loves us so much that as the Bible says, *"if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."* (2 Tim. 2:13)

I've experienced that in my own life. There was a time when I ignored God completely but he kept bugging me, so to speak. He never stopped showing his care for me. Like when I was backslidden way back in 1989 and I was in Osaka, Japan attending computer training. On my first night there, I met another Filipino in the hostel where I stayed. His name is Elpidio and we called him "Pidio." Pidio is very friendly and very nice. I discovered he is a Christian because he invited me to a church that Sunday. I didn't tell him I am a Christian too because at that point in my life, I became an agnostic.

We became good friends and he always offered help whenever I needed it, even money. Honestly, he was like Jesus. God used him to draw me closer to him. Slowly, I began to develop a soft heart for God again.

If you're a Christian, you should not hesitate to ask God for help. Like this lady who prayed, "Dear God, so far today I've done alright, I haven't gossiped, lost my temper, been nasty, selfish or over indulgent. But in a few minutes God, I'm going to get out of bed and from then on, I'm going to need all the help I can get."

The Bible says in Hebrews 4:16 (CEV), "*So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.*"

You see, if you're a Christian, you have a direct line to God. You don't need the operator, you don't need to dial 9 or 011 to get through. And there's no busy signal. The moment you utter a word, God responds right away. He will not put you on hold. Because he is interested in you. He delights in you. He cares for you so much. The iPhone and Android may fail you, but God never will.

There are two reasons why we don't ask for help.

First, because of self-sufficiency. We think we can fend for ourselves. We think we don't need others' help. We're just so confident about our own abilities and

capabilities. And because of this, there's no room in our hearts for God. To us, God is just a distraction.

Second, because of self-pity. We think we don't deserve God's help because of our past mistakes. We feel we have committed the worst sin that it seems we're beyond redemption. And we have a mistaken notion of God that we look at him as a big cop in the sky who will beat us with his club if ever we own up to our sins.

Folks, if you're self-sufficient, remember that you are not perfect and the world is not perfect.

Sooner or later, a crisis will hit you and you will need to ask for God's help when that time comes. Better recognize your limitations earlier to better prepare you for tough times ahead. With God by your side, he will cushion life's blows.

On the other hand, if you have self-pity, don't worry about coming to God. He will understand. He's a God of second chances, you see. Just be honest with him, open your heart to him and God will be faithful to embrace you in his arms. He will forgive your sins and forget them. Psalm 103:11-13 says, *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him."*

Right now, some of you need God's help. You're on the edge of despair. Things look bleak. You feel like throwing the towel. Perhaps, you're caught in an impossible situation. You don't know how to get out of it.

Let me tell you. **God majors in impossibilities.** He is still in the miracle-working business. He will never close down. All you need to do is "Be still" and "know" that God is your refuge, your strength and ever-present help in trouble.

This is God's way of winning. **God doesn't want you to quit.** He wants you to win because he has a purpose for your life. How do you know that your purpose is already done? If you're still alive, it's not. So, better get on track. Remember, God is your refuge, your strength, and your ever-present help in trouble.