

Tough Faith is Powered by the Spirit
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We are in a sermon series called Tough Faith for Tough Times. We've seen that tough times come to everyone. We must not be surprised by tough times. But we must respond in tough times in ways that build our faith rather than tearing down our faith.

Last week we saw how to build tough faith:
 Proper nutrition – which is the word of God
 Proper exercise – by doing the word of God
 Proper rest – which is resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Today is Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So I am preaching a message entitled Tough Faith is Powered by the Spirit.

I want you to think back to the disciples at the time Jesus was crucified. Matthew 26:56 reveals that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane - *At that point, all the disciples deserted Him and fled.*

All the disciples deserted Jesus and ran when he was taken by the authorities and crucified. They hid in fear with the doors locked. They certainly did not have tough faith at that time.

Yet, they all became bold, fearless men. They preached the gospel in spite of threats, beatings, and imprisonment. Most of them died horrific martyrs' deaths for the lord. What changed them? What gave them tough faith?

Two things: First they had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. They saw Him. They knew He was alive. Secondly – they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. And if you are going to have tough faith you need those same two things:

An encounter with the resurrected Christ that results in you being born again... AND You need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:3-8 says:

After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And that's exactly what happened in Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This drew a crowd and Peter preached the Gospel to them. When he was finished - Acts 2:37-39 says

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Peter told them - Be saved – Be water baptized – Be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And notice what else he said – this promise is for everyone throughout history who is called by God to salvation. He was talking about you there! You need to follow the same pattern and be saved, water baptized and baptized in the Holy Spirit. This same pattern can be seen throughout the Bible.

We saw in Acts 2 that the early church changed from a group with timid faith to a group with tough faith. They began to operate in the supernatural power of God. And I don't find anywhere where the Bible says God ever wanted us to stop being a supernatural church where His miracles are on display.

So how do we tap into the supernatural power of God and develop tough faith? The same way the early church did. By being baptized in the Holy Spirit. By continuing in God's word, in prayer, in unity, in praise and worship. It didn't stop in Bible days. This promise is for every Christian in history. And here's why:

1- You cannot have tough faith in your own power

Think of an electric drill that is not plugged in. It won't turn on without power. No matter how many times you click the switch, pray for it to work, cast out non-drilling demons or confess it really works, an electric drill will not work until it is plugged into a power source.

We are like that tool in the hand of God, on our own we can do nothing; we are powerless – helpless. But when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can do all things.

Many Christians are living their lives trying and failing. They try and they fail so they try harder! But you cannot be righteous on your own!

You cannot experience miracles on your own!
 You can't CHANGE yourself! The best you can do is REARRANGE yourself!
 You can't FREE yourself! You'll just continue to BE yourself!
 You need something greater than yourself!
 You need the supernatural power of God!

Some things are impossible to do in our own power: like trying to water ski without a power boat. You may have skis and go out to the lake expecting the skis to power you, but they have no power in themselves. They cannot propel you across the water. Maybe you can get someone to push you, but that won't get you very far. To water ski, you need a boat with power. To go to a higher level, you may choose air power. Or supersonic power.

Too many Christians are trying to live their lives in their own strength. They give it their best but their hard work never pays off. They never develop tough faith.

That's because self-sufficiency will not get you very far. Trying harder in your own strength will not get you very far. We need God's power in order to develop tough faith. 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 says:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.

The Amplified Version says - *Our power and ability and sufficiency are from God.* Too many Christians are making the mistake of trying to be strong in themselves. This may surprise you - but the key to the Christian life is not you getting stronger - it's you acknowledging your weakness and then placing your absolute dependence on the power of God!

God told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

That's why Paul said: *When I am weak, then I am strong.* He understood that we are the strongest when we are not trusting in our strength, but in God's. That's what glorifies God!

The Bible does not tell us to be strong in our strength. It tells us in Ephesians 6:10 *Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

So how do we plug into the supernatural power of God that develops tough faith?

2- We plug into God's power by being baptized in the Holy Spirit

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience after salvation where you are filled with the Holy Spirit and given supernatural gifts and power. Jesus – speaking to people who were already believers - said in Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

We access the power of the Spirit through being filled with the Spirit.

My father is a Baptist pastor. My father led me to the Lord when I was a child and he baptized me. We were Baptists and we thought that's all there was. But I'll never forget the day when in 1974 when my Dad showed up at our house and announced, "I'm here to pray for you to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues and I'm not leaving until you get it."

I asked what that was and he explained to us how he had been alone in his office praying when he felt the Lord telling him to raise his hands. When he did, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues. Before he left that day, Deb and I both received this power from on high. It changed our lives drastically. We did speak in tongues and that ability to have the Holy Spirit pray the perfect will of God through us is a precious privilege to us.

Now some people think that those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit think they are better than other Christians. I don't think that. But here's what I do know. After we were baptized in the Holy Spirit, we were way better off than we were before.

Prayer became powerful as we prayed in the Spirit.
 The Word of God came live to us!
 And we were birthed into worship.
 No more were we content to just sing some songs.
 No more were we in a hurry to get church over.
 No more were we just doing our religious duty.
 We were full of love for Jesus and we wanted to spend time in His presence.
 We were radically different people.
 And we started developing tough faith!

You see, that's how you know you've encountered the power of the Holy Spirit: you change, you go away different. Things you couldn't do before, you can now do. Things you shouldn't do, you now have the power to actually not do. The Holy Spirit is the source of that power. Zechariah 4:6 says: *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.*

I want you to think about this: before Jesus was water baptized He did no miracles and preached no sermons. But after that, He began to do miracles and operate in the power of God. What happened?

Did water baptism have that effect on Him? NO. After Jesus was baptized - Luke 4:1 says: *Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan.*

Jesus did not start operating in the supernatural until after He was filled with the Spirit. If Jesus was transformed by being filled with the Spirit and the disciples were transformed by being filled with the Spirit, how much more do we need to be filled with the Spirit? You were wired for God's power and that comes from being filled with the Spirit of God.

That's what happened in the book of Acts. They also plugged into the power of God through prayer and the Word. Acts 2:42-43 says:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

And we must do the same thing to experience the same results!

3- We plug into God's power through prayer and the Word of God.

But I want you to understand that prayer and the Word must both be saturated with the Spirit of God. Ephesians 6:18 tells us to *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

It's the power of the Holy Spirit that energizes our prayer. And without the power of the Spirit, we will never receive the power of the Word. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

It takes the Spirit of God to understand the Word of God.

There is life in the Spirit and life in the Word.

The power of God is released through the Word of God energized by the Spirit of God and activated by a child of God praying in faith to God.

I want to encourage you to live your life as though it depended upon prayer and the Word of God. You know why? Because it does! Your life depends on plugging into the supernatural power of God through prayer.

Prayer acknowledges our weakness and God's power.

Prayer admits we can't but declares God can!

Prayer gets you out of the natural and into the supernatural.

Prayer gets you out of yourself and into the Spirit!

There is power in prayer and there is power in the Word.

So, there is multiplied power when we combine the Word and prayer.

When I pray for something, I try to find a promise in the Bible to pray:

- If I'm sick, I pray the Word that promises by His stripes I am healed.
- If I'm bound by something, I pray the Word that He who the Son sets free is free indeed.
- If I'm afraid, I pray the Word that God has not given me a spirit of fear.
- If I've sinned I confess it and pray the Word that when I confess He is faithful to forgive me and cleanse me.
- If I have a financial need, I pray the Word that God will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Let me tell you the Word is alive, the Word is powerful, and the Word works, but it's got to be put to work. And that happens through the prayer of faith.

In the kingdom of God, nothing happens until somebody prays in faith. The way we put the Word to work is by believing it and doing it and by praying it in faith in times of need. There is supernatural power in prayer!

Isaiah prayed and the sun stood still.

Paul and Silas prayed in prison and God set them free.

Elijah prayed and it did not rain for 3½ years.

Well, Pastor Joe, that was in the Bible days and those were Bible heroes. Don't think God answered these people's prayers because they were super saints! James says Elijah was like us and God answered his prayer! James 5:16-18 says:

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

People like us can pray prayers that are powerful and effective.

So - what level of power are you choosing?

Self-powered or God-powered? Natural or supernatural?

Your answer determines whether or not you develop tough faith.

You see - it all depends on whose hand you're in!

Are you trying to handle things with your own hands?

Or are you placing things by faith into God's hands?

You see, whose hands it's in makes all the difference.

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$10.

A basketball in LeBron James' hands is worth about \$37 million a year.

It all depends on whose hands it's in...

A football in my hands is worth about \$20.
 A football in Dak Prescott's hands is soon to be worth \$35 million a year.
 It all depends on whose hands it's in...

A golf club in my hands is absolutely useless.
 A golf club in Tiger Wood's hands is worth hundreds of millions.
 It depends on whose hands it's in...

A staff in my hands is just a piece of wood.
 But a staff in the hands of Moses parted the Red Sea because Moses was in God's hands! It depends on whose hands it's in...

A sling shot in my hands is just a toy.
 But a slingshot in David's hands became a mighty weapon because David was in God's hands! It depends on whose hands it's in...

Two fish and five loaves in my hands is a couple of tuna sandwiches.
 Two fish and five loaves in Jesus' hands will feed thousands.
 It depends on whose hands they're in...

Nails in my hands might produce a bird house.
 Nails in the hands of Jesus produced salvation for the entire world.
 It depends on whose hands they're in...

So you see everything in life depends on whose hands it's in. So put your concerns, worries, fears, hopes, dreams, job, money, family, relationships - put your entire life in God's Hands. Because, it all depends on whose hands you're in.

You can try to find peace on your own, or you can place your life into the hands of the Prince of Peace and find a peace that passes understanding!

You can try to find happiness of your own, or you can place your life in God's hands and find that His joy is your strength!

You can try to live life and develop tough faith in your own power - or you can be filled with the Holy Spirit and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You can try to find righteousness on your own and live your whole life wondering if you're good enough, or you can place your life into the hands of Jesus Christ who became sin so that you can become righteous!

He gave His life for you, now it's your turn to give Him yours. You've had your life in your own hands long enough. You've made enough messes - it's time to turn it over to God. Give God your entire life and He will give you abundant life now and eternal life in heaven.