

**Tough Faith is Courageous Faith**  
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We are in a sermon series called Tough Faith for Tough Times.  
 Today I'm preaching on Tough Faith is Courageous Faith.

Over and over in the Bible – when people got a vision from God – He told them to be courageous. You see having a word from God is one thing – possessing your promise is something else.

For example – God gave the Promised Land to the Children of Israel but when it came time to possess the promise – many of them were afraid and backed down. When it finally came time for Joshua to advance, God told him in Joshua 1:6-9 –

*Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*

Over and over God told him – be strong and courageous.

I'm telling you the same thing today. Be strong and courageous.  
 If you want to save your marriage - be strong and courageous.  
 If you want to get out of debt - be strong and courageous.  
 If you want a miracle - be strong and courageous.  
 If you want to advance into God's promise for you, be strong and courageous.  
 The cowardly never advance into the promises of God.  
 The cowardly never make it out of the land of left behind.  
 The cowardly die off in the wilderness of wandering.  
 It takes courage to advance.

It took courage for Joshua to advance into the Promised Land. After all, there were giants in the land. It took courage for David to advance against Goliath. After all, he was a giant. And there are giants in your land of promise but with God on your side, you can defeat them, so advance with courage!

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, the city of God. His army leveled and burned the city and took the people captive. All this happened because of the disobedience of God's people.

Jeremiah had prophesied this. He said that God had sent prophets for years trying to warn His people to turn from sin or they would go into captivity.

And that's exactly what happened.  
 But God also promised to restore His people when they repented.

Jeremiah 29:10 says:

*This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place."*

After the 70 years, God kept His word and brought His people back from captivity to the Promised Land. The people started rebuilding the city which was destroyed.

They started by rebuilding the Temple, but they soon got discouraged and quit. They were discouraged because their enemies mocked them. They were discouraged because it was taking so long. They were discouraged because the temple was not as good as the old one. They had built the altar and foundation of the Temple, but they quit before the job was finished.

So God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to call the people to complete what they started. Haggai dealt with the discouragement of God's people. First, he addressed the fact that their discouragement caused the people to become disinterested in building God's house and more concerned about building their own houses.

This can happen to us too. We can get so caught up in building our own house, our own family or our own career that we lose interest in the things of God. But we do that to our own detriment. God takes disinterest in spiritual things very seriously. As a result, we must deal ruthlessly with disinterest towards them.

What does disinterest look like?

It looks like not wanting to go to church.

It looks like not wanting to read your Bible.

It looks like not wanting to pray.

It looks like not wanting to tithe or give.

It looks like not wanting to use your gifts or talents for the Lord.

To get over this, we need to the same thing that the people in Haggai's time needed. We need the fear of the Lord. Haggai 1:12 says:

*Then the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.*

The fear of the Lord will cause us to not want to displease Him. The fear of the Lord will cause us to put Him and His work first in our lives.

The second things that caused discouragement in the people in Haggai's time faced was dissatisfaction. They were dissatisfied because the temple they were building was not as beautiful as the one that had been torn down. God told Haggai to ask the people in Haggai 2:3-4

*'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty.*

One of the major causes of dissatisfaction is comparing. The people in Haggai's time were comparing the new temple with the old. This caused dissatisfaction.

For us:

Comparing our jobs can cause dissatisfaction.

Comparing our pay can cause dissatisfaction.

Comparing our accomplishments with what others have accomplished can cause dissatisfaction.

can come when we compare our incomes or our spouses or our families or our looks or any number of things. But comparing is never wise. 2 Corinthians 10:12 says:

*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

Comparing yourself to someone else will never accomplish any good. Neither will comparing these days to the old days. Ecclesiastes 7:10 says:

*Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.*

What's the cure for dissatisfaction? Getting our eyes on the right thing. Here's what God said through Haggai in 2:9

*'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty.'*

God says, "What you're looking at may not look like much right now, but I'm not done yet! I will put my glory on this house and it will be greater than the former house."

What you're looking at right now in your life or your finances or your marriage may not look like much – but God's not finished with you yet!

Stop looking backwards at the good old days. Stop comparing yourself to others. Get your eyes on God and His vision for your future!

The third problem Haggai addressed was discouragement because things were taking longer than the builders thought it should. They expected a few months of work to undo the results of years of destruction and neglect.

Now, you don't ever do that, do you?

When dreams don't come true right away it is easy to get discouraged. Proverbs 13:12 says:

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.*

Delays can cause discouragement. According to Webster's discouragement means to lose courage.

Courage means facing a dangerous, difficult or painful circumstance instead of withdrawing from it. When we are discouraged we don't do that; we give up. We just don't have the courage to try.

When things don't happen like we expect, we can get discouraged. When it's taking us a long time to change and grow, we can get discouraged. Discourage means to lose courage or confidence; to be disappointed, deflated and dejected. Courage means the ability to do something that scares you.

I remember a time when our grandson David was little and I took him to McDonalds. It had a playground with a bridge he was afraid to cross. I kept encouraging him to try until he was able to go across. I said, "David, you were so brave." He said, "No I'm not." I asked why? He said, "Because I was afraid." Then I told him, "Son – being brave does not mean you are not afraid. It means you do what you are afraid of doing." You see, it takes no courage to do something you are not afraid of.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is choosing to confront your fear in the face of pain, danger, uncertainty or intimidation. It's the ability to face scary things without being overcome by fear. Courage is not the absence of fear – it is choosing to do it afraid! When you face your fear by doing what you are afraid to do, you break the power of fear in your life. 1 John 5:4 says:

*This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.*

Lack of courage results in being discouraged. At those times we need to be encouraged. To encourage means to give courage, confidence or hope. So how do we get encouraged? How do we build courage?

First and foremost, we get encouragement from God and from His word. Hopefully, you have others around you to encourage you. We find support, belonging, acceptance, encouragement, and strength from others. The Apostle Paul talked about this in 2 Corinthians 7:5-6:

*When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside. But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by...*

How do you think God encouraged Paul? Here's how: *...by the arrival of Titus.*

God could have encouraged Paul all by Himself – but sometimes God does some of His best work through people!

All of us need God – but all of us also need friends from God who will comfort us and encourage us. But it goes both ways.... If you want people to be there for you in tough times you need to be there for others in the tough times.

In fact, you need to surround yourself with people who encourage you and build you up, not people who discourage you and tear you down.

But there are times when you will have to encourage yourself. If you get tempted to give up, pray and remind yourself of God's promises. Romans 15:4-5 says:

*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

*Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.*

Encouragement comes from God, but it comes through the word and prayer. And remember you multiply prayer power by praying the Word. So, we receive courage by praying and by encouraging yourself in the word.

When I think of discouragement, I think of King David. He and his army returned home from a battle and found that while they were away, the Amalekites attacked the city, burned it, and took everyone captive. All their wives and children and possessions were gone. 1 Samuel 30:3-6 says:

*When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.*

David was greatly distressed. Not only was he carrying the burden of his men's losses and the burden of a defeat from the enemy, but he had lost everything himself. His own family was missing. And the men he led were now blaming him for their troubles.

David was overwhelmed and could have easily given up. But listened to what he did: But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. When nobody else encouraged him, he encouraged himself. Some translations say He strengthened himself in the Lord. The point is: encouragement gives us strength and courage.

For some of you here - your troubles have overwhelmed you. And you don't know what to do. You don't know what your next move is. I'll tell you what your next move is: ENCOURAGE YOURSELF in the Lord!

Sometimes there is no one else around who can encourage you. It seems like everyone has turned against you. At those times, we must do what David did and encourage ourselves.

How did David encourage himself? These verses don't say, but we can see how David encouraged himself in the Psalms. In Psalm 103:1-2 David said:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits.*

Who is David talking to? Himself.

What does he tell himself to do? To bless the Lord and forget not all His benefits. In this Psalm, David goes on to remind himself about God's benefits:

- God healed him when he was sick.
- God forgave him when he sinned.
- God brought him out of a pit and satisfied him with good things.

When you are down and discouraged, do what David did. Bless the Lord and remind yourself of all the good things God has done for you.

In Psalm 42:5-6 David said:

*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember You.*

Who is David talking to? Himself.

Who is David encouraging? Himself.

I could show you many other verses where David encouraged himself.

We must learn to do the same thing.

Sometimes you've got to preach to yourself.

Sometimes you've got to tell yourself good news.

Sometimes you've got to remind yourself about all God's done for you.

Sometimes you've got to encourage yourself in the Lord.

Here's the amazing thing: when David encouraged himself, he got up and went after the enemy and verses 18 and 19 say:

*David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken... Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.*

That should say something to somebody here today. Everything that the Devil took from you, with God's help you can get it back.

You lost your job - But God can help you get another one.

You lost your reputation - But God can help you get it back.

The devil took your friends - But God can help you get them back.  
 The devil took your health - But God can help you get it back.

You need to encourage yourself with that truth. Tell yourself:  
 Everything that the Devil stole from me....I'll get it back.  
 My family.....I'll get it back.  
 My finances.....I'll get it back.  
 My joy.....oh I may sad right now.....things may look bad right now, but  
 everything that the Devil stole from me I'm going to get it back!

You need to encourage yourself in the Lord. How do you do that?  
 We can encourage ourselves by reminding ourselves that when we are weak, He is  
 strong.

We can encourage ourselves by reminding ourselves that He is with us always, He  
 will never leave us or forsake us.

We can encourage ourselves by reminding ourselves that He is Jehovah Jireh our  
 provider.

We can encourage ourselves by reminding ourselves that the Lord is our  
 shepherd and we shall not want.

Somebody here needs to talk to yourself.  
 You need to talk to yourself. But don't quote Oprah.  
 You need to talk to yourself. But don't quote Dr. Phil.  
 You need to talk to yourself. But don't even mention Jerry Springer.

You need to encourage yourself with some good news.  
 You need to remind yourself of everything God's done for you.  
 Encourage yourself in the Lord.

I want to be your Barnabas today by encouraging you with this:  
 We all feel like giving up at times – but God never gives up on us!  
 We all feel left behind at times – but God never leaves us or forsakes us!  
 We all feel discouraged at times – but God always encourages us!  
 We all deserve judgment at times – but God's mercy always triumphs over God's  
 judgment!

Can you thank God for that?  
 And we have His promise that His mercies will never cease!  
 In fact – His mercies are brand new this morning!  
 And they'll be new tomorrow morning – and the day after tomorrow – and the day  
 after that – and every single day of your life!  
 God will never run out of mercy!  
 Can you thank God for mercy!!