

How to Build Tough Faith
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 5/24/2020

I've lost 30 pounds by eating right and exercising. Getting and staying in shape is not an easy thing. And you hear so many different reports about what makes you healthy.

I think a lot of us have come to the conclusion that getting into shape - not only physically, but spiritually – is too hard, so we give up. Actually getting into shape is simple – not easy – but simple.

Last week we talked about the need to have Tough Faith for Tough Times.

We saw that tough times come to everyone.

Tough times never last, tough times come to pass.

We saw that we need to change the way we respond to tough times.

We must not be surprised by tough times. Rather, we must develop tough faith for tough times. How do we do that?

We saw last week that it takes tough times to develop tough faith. But tough times alone don't develop tough faith. It's how you choose to respond to the tough time. The way you respond will either tear you down or build you up. I want you to build yourself up. That's why I'm preaching today on How to Build Tough Faith.

I studied all through the Bible about what helps us grow, mature and be built up in our faith. I boiled it all down to three things we need to build tough faith.

I see parallels between growing physically strong and growing spiritually strong. Spiritual growth sometimes seems harder to understand – but if we compare it to physical growth – it becomes easier to understand. To grow strong physically – we need three basic things: proper nutrition, proper rest and proper exercise. Likewise - To grow strong spiritually – we need three basic things: proper nutrition, proper rest and proper exercise.

There are no shortcuts to spiritual growth and maturity – just like there are no shortcuts to get in shape physically. Everyone's looking for the magic pill to instantly drop pounds and get in shape. We don't want to do what we know works – eat right and exercise. We want to eat whatever we want – as much as we want – and never exercise – yet still be in shape.

At any given time you can find an “infomercial” on television featuring the latest fitness product on the market. For example:

· “The Thigh Master” · “The Abdominizer” · “The Gut-Be-Gone”

They all promise the same thing: If you'll follow their training plan, you can be physically fit in a few days. And just when you think you've seen it all...

While flying one time I was flipping through the “Sky Mall” catalogue when I noticed a picture of a man hooked up to several electrodes on various muscles on his body. The advertisement stated that gyms and fitness centers are a thing of the past. All you need to do now is to hook up to our machine that sends an electric current to stimulate your muscles and work them out while you just lay on the couch watching TV and eating Twinkies.

Folks – there are no shortcuts to getting in shape – physically or spiritually! There’s work to be done! It’s a daily process of proper nutrition, exercise and rest. So – in order to build tough faith - we need proper nutrition, exercise and rest.

1- Building Tough Faith Requires Proper Nutrition

Physically – we need proper nutrition to live, grow and be strong.
 Spiritually – we need proper nutrition to live, grow and be strong.
 So – what is proper spiritual nutrition? The Word of God.
 We start with milk. 1 Peter 2:2 says:

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

But we need to move on to solid food. Hebrews 5:12-14 says:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God’s word all over again; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age...

You are what you eat. What you eat physically becomes part of your body. What you feed yourself spiritually becomes part of you spiritually, so it needs to be good food. We need to feed ourselves on the word of God.

Too many Christians live on the bottle – and I’m not talking about alcohol. I’m talking about a milk bottle. There are way too many Christians living on spiritual baby food.

By the way – how do babies eat that stuff? It looks nasty. I don’t know of any adults who eat baby food. Why would you eat those nasty, watered down, tasteless strained green peas when you can eat a juicy grilled steak and a loaded baked potato?

Too many Christians should be mature, but are still immature because they are not feeding on the meat of God’s word.
 Too many Christians should be teaching God’s Word, but still need to be taught Gods’ Word.

How do you know if you're still on milk? You only understand the basics of the faith – but you need help to even remember them. You can't seem to grasp the deeper truths of God's Word. But you will not develop tough faith if you do not develop the mental and spiritual toughness to press in to feed yourself on God's Word and to do the hard work of understanding the deeper truths in it.

Too many Christians are like children learning to read or do math. It's very hard at first. You've got to learn the alphabet and phonics to know how to sound out words. It's easier to get mommy or daddy to read to you. But if you're going to grow and learn – you've got to do it for yourself.

It's the same with the word of God. It's easier to have the pastors teach you the word. Yes – that's part of our job. But we must also teach you how to feed yourself!

In order to build tough faith, you must regularly feed on God's Word.
 If you don't feed yourself God's word, you will have no strength.
 If you feed yourself a little on the word, you'll have a little strength.
 If you feed yourself a lot on the word, you'll have a lot of strength.

Romans 10:17 says: *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Notice, it does not say faith comes by hearing the word of God. It says faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God.

When you spend time with God in His word, He will speak to you and when God speaks to you, it will build tough faith.

Without faith you will never attempt anything big for God.

Without faith you will never believe for miracles.

Without faith you will not operate in the supernatural power of God.

Do you ever wonder why some people seem to accomplish so much in the Lord? How do they do that? They hear from God and do what He says! Daniel 11:32 says:

The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

If you know God – if you know His voice – if you know that you know that you've heard from God – you will have tough faith – and when you have tough faith you can:

- Climb any mountain
- Cross any river
- Travel any distance
- Wait any amount of time
- Fight any enemy
- In fact, you can go right up to the gates of hell with a water pistol

Why? Because you've heard from God and hearing from God builds faith. There is nothing like the confidence that comes when you know you've heard God.

Tough faith is developed when we hear God in His word.
 Tough faith is built when we believe God's word.
 Tough faith is exercised when you do God's word.
 Tough faith is expressed when we confess God's Word.

Tough faith speaks God's word into tough situations.
 So, if your life's a mess, you must confess.
 If you need to stabilize, you must learn to verbalize.
 The power you display depends on the words that you say.

To build tough faith, we must feed on God's word. Not only do we need proper nutrition to build tough faith, but we also need exercise.

2- Building Tough Faith Requires Proper Exercise

Remember Hebrews 5:14 we read earlier? It said we need to move from milk to meat because:

Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

We develop spiritually through reason of use and exercise. Use causes development – “No pain – No gain” – “Use it or lose it”

What do we need to exercise ourselves in? How do we build ourselves up spiritually? 1 Timothy 4:7-8 says:

... exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

We need to exercise ourselves in godliness.
 We need to exercise our faith in order to build tough faith.
 There are several kinds of faith mentioned in the Bible –

- Saving faith
- The gift of faith
- Romans 12:3 says: *God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

God has given each of us a measure of faith – it is up to us to use it, strengthen it and grow it.

It seems that the need and desire for more faith or greater faith goes all the way back to the original 12 disciples. Luke 17:5-6 says:

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

All of us go through times when we see we need more faith – or a tougher faith. There are times we all struggle with doubt. There are times we all feel weak in our faith. But the Bible teaches us how to build tough faith. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised in order for it to grow.

How do you exercise your “faith muscles”? We feed our faith by reading God’s word. We exercise our faith muscles by doing the Word. We must hear the word, believe the word, confess the word and DO the word.

James 1:22 says: *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*

One of the main ways we exercise our faith is through prayer – especially praying in the Spirit. Jude 20 says:

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...

What is praying in the spirit? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.

Have you ever experienced a circumstance where you just didn’t know how to pray? Where your understanding was not enough? It is faith building at those times say, “God – I don’t know how to pray in this situation – pray your will through me” – and then begin to pray in the spirit. Romans 8:26-27 says:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

When we pray in the spirit it builds our faith because we have the confidence that the Holy Spirit is praying the perfect will of God through us.

Not only do we grow spiritually strong through proper nutrition and exercise, but also:

3- Building Tough Faith Requires Proper Rest

What does rest have to do with spiritual development? Physically – muscles do not grow during exercise – exercise actually tears the muscle down – it is during rest that muscle builds. Spiritually – we will not develop – no matter how much we do – until we learn to rest in the Lord.

Until we rest – all of our doing is a performance orientation where we view our righteousness based on what we do not on what the Lord has done. Spiritual rest is not doing nothing – it is not apathy – it is not laziness – spiritual rest is a place of active trust and reliance on the work of Christ.

Without rest we will always strive – when we learn to rest we will thrive. Without rest we are driven to perform – when we learn to rest we will be transformed.

Without rest our worries increase - when we learn to rest we are full of peace. Without rest, you feel you are never good enough no matter what you do. The place of rest is the place where we know our righteousness is based on what Christ did, not on what we do. It's knowing it's more about what He did for us that what we do for Him.

When we rest – our exercise – our doing – flows out of who He is and who we are in Him. Doing becomes an exercise based in love, not legalism.

Jesus has freed us from carrying the load of our own sin – He bore it for us. He said in Matthew 11:28-30:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

comes through faith Hebrews 4:3, 9-10 says:

For we who have believed do enter that rest... There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Rest comes from ceasing from working for our salvation. Rest only comes when we totally trust God. That's why I always teach about the two sides of faith.

1- The belief side of faith

To believe is to be confident that something is true and to expect it to come to pass. To believe is to know that something exists even when there is no physical proof of its existence or reality.

This is the kind of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 – the great faith chapter of the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 says: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

I preach that we should have big dreams and believe God for big things. But everything does not always work out like we thought. That's why we need the second side of faith.

2- The trust side of faith

There are times we don't understand tough times we go through, but we choose to walk by faith not by sight.

We choose to trust God and we choose to worship at all times.
 We choose to believe God is good all the time, even now.
 We choose to trust in His ways, even when we don't understand.

During tough times, we must trust in the goodness and wisdom of God. We must believe big, pray big prayers and expect big answers, but when God in His sovereign wisdom does things in a different way than we think He should – we must trust that He is right. Proverbs 3:5-6 says: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

Our own understanding will not get us through tough times. We cannot lean on it the least little bit. We must totally trust God.

You can build tough faith. It comes from feeding on the word of God – exercising yourself in faith and godliness – and resting in the finished work of the Lord. What kind of faith do you have?

- Tough faith knows we will go through tough times, but with God's power we will make it through.
- Tough faith knows we have things to overcome, but with God's help we will overcome.
- Tough faith knows we have tough enemies, but in Jesus' name we defeat them.
- Tough faith is tougher than tough times – than tough enemies – than anything that can come against us!
 Why – because If God be for us, who can be against us?