

## Faith in Action

### Week 12: Putting Your Faith Into Action

#### Hebrews 12:1-3

Back in the Spring, a buddy of mine, Andrew Clampett, reached out and said, “Hey, I’m doing a Tough Mudder at the end of July. Do you want to join me?” And if you don’t know what a Tough Mudder is, it’s a 6 mile run around this course filled with about 20 different obstacles involving mud and climbing. It’s like an adventure race.

And, one of the things Tough Mudder is known for is the final obstacle called “Electroshock Therapy.” (Show picture) Those black things hanging down are wires pulsating with 10,000 volts of electricity. So, you run through it **knowing** you’re going to get hit with a jolt, but you don’t know when, or how many times. But, after you make it through, the finish line is like 10’ on the other side.

So, we go through the course and we’re doing pretty well. We’re muddy and cut up and bleeding, but we’re making it through the obstacles. And then we get to this one. I watch as Andrew goes through it and I can tell the moment he got hit because he just like went limp and fell into the water. I saw another guy go and the same thing happened, and I’m like, “What am I doing?!” I’m questioning all of my life’s decisions that led to this moment.

But then I look over and catch a quick glimpse of a couple of things. There’s a crowd of people standing there, cheering everyone on as they go through this last hurdle before the finish line. And, that helped a little bit, but I’m like, “Are you cheering us on to encourage us, or because you just want to see the carnage that follows?”

The second thing I notice are the people who have already gone through it and come out on the other side. When you finish the course, you get a finishers headband and seeing all of these people who have already finished the race, cheering us on made me think, “Okay, if they did it, I can do this too.”

And so, I put my head down and started running, determined to reach the end. Almost immediately I was hit with a jolt of electricity that pulsed through my entire body. My legs gave out from underneath me and I dropped like a sack of potatoes. It was not my finest moment. But, I finished and got my headband. When I got home, Amber asked, “How was it?” I said, “That was the dumbest thing I’ve ever done...and it was awesome!”

That event is not for the faint of heart, right? In fact, they have warning signs all over the place saying you shouldn’t do it if you faint or have a weak heart. And yet, over the course of that weekend, there were 1,000’s of people who went through it and made it to the end beaten up and bruised. Thousands of people who received their finishers headband, maybe even some of you, because they put their fears to the side and faced the challenges head on.

In a way, I think that walking by faith is kind of like that. The author of Hebrews says that faith is being confident in what you hope for and assured of what you do not see, and that can be hard. Walking by faith can lead you to some challenging places. It can lead you to places where you have to cast your fears aside. You have to come to the end of yourself, the end of your resources and strength, and learn how to fully trust in the Lord. That's not easy. That's why I believe that **Putting your faith into action is not for the faint of heart.**

Putting your faith into action takes courage and commitment. It takes strength and endurance. I think the reason why so many of us, myself included, often times settle for a faith that is safe and comfortable is because we're afraid of what it might cost us to truly follow Jesus. What we might lose if we walk in full faith and surrender. I think, intuitively, we know that putting your faith into action is not for the faint of heart.

I think that's the point of our text today. If you have a Bible or a Bible app, turn to Hebrews 12 with me.

All summer long, we've looked at the courageous men and women in Hebrews 11 who cast their fears to the side and put their faith into action. They stepped out and took risks. They walked with a sense of trust and confidence in the Lord. We've looked at the faith of everyone from a prostitute to the patriarchs, and as we round the corner and head to the finish line of this series, I want to move from talking about *their* faith, to looking at our own. From how they put their faith into action, to how we can put out faith into action.

That's the transition the author of Hebrews makes as well. Look at our text. Hebrews 12, starting in verse 1...**(READ vs. 1-3)**

I love this text. The author has just spent an entire chapter talking about the faith of all of these people. People who were broken and flawed, just like we are, and yet walked with an incredible trust in the Lord. He spent the last chapter looking back, but now he turns his attention to his own faith community. He says, "in light of all these faithful men and women we can look to...this great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us...let's put our own faith into action just like they did."

And he uses this analogy of a runner in a race. In that time, when they were training, athletes would weigh themselves down in order to build strength and endurance. But then, when race day came along, the Greek custom was to strip everything off and run as *necked* as a toddler who just got out of the tub. They would take off anything that would add weight or slow them down or hinder them in any way.

The author taps into that image and applies it to our walk with Jesus. He knows that running this race of faith is hard enough without weighing ourselves down with burdens we don't have to carry. So he tells us to throw off our doubts, our fears, our worries. He tells us to throw off our sin that wraps around our feet and trips us up. Throw all of those things off so we can run with perseverance through the challenges and the obstacles.

And, through it all, the author implores us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Our motivation for enduring comes from the example of Jesus. Jesus looked beyond the physical and emotional pain of the cross to the joy of fulfilling God's plan of redemption. The joy of paying the price for our adoption into God's family. So, when putting your faith into action gets tough, and you're tempted to lose heart or throw in the towel, fix your eyes on Jesus. His endurance is a model for us on how to overcome challenges and remain steadfast in our faith.

I think about this verse a lot of times when I'm mowing. I love mowing. I've even confessed in here before that, in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we had to write a poem and mine was about how much I love to mow. And one of my favorite parts is when I'm done, looking back and seeing nice, straight, even lines in our yard. There's something so satisfying about that.

And, coming from a family of farmers, I remember my dad teaching me at a young age that the way you get those nice, straight lines is by looking forward, fixing your eyes on a set point, and then moving towards it. If you look down at where you are, or back at where you've been, or around at what you still have to do, you're going to start weaving and get off course.

I think the same is true for our faith. If we walk in faith with our head down, or are always looking back on where we've been and what we've done. If we're looking around us at all of our fears or temptations, struggles, we're going to go off course. But, if we fix our eyes on Jesus, our true north, and walk towards him, he will guide our steps and keep us moving in the right direction.

That's true in our lives, but it's true for our Church, too. It can be tempting to walk with our head down, worried about where we are. Or looking back at where we've been, longing for the "glory days." We can look around us at our culture and get discouraged. But, Jesus invites us, His Church, to collectively fix our eyes on Him and trust where He is leading us.

And, I want to make sure we don't miss this part of our text today. Putting your faith into action is not for the faint of heart. That's true. But, the good news is, you don't have to do it alone. In fact, you were never *meant* to do it alone. The author of Hebrews address his faith community in chapter 12. He's talking to the church, not just individuals. And I think the takeaway for us is that **Putting your faith into action happens best in a faith community.**

We need one another to encourage us, challenge us, confront us sometimes if we're living in sin. We need a church family that's going to love us as we are, but also love us enough to help us grow in our faith and surrender to the Lord. That's not going to affirm everything we practice or believe, but will lovingly help us be formed into the image of Christ. That will help us throw off anything and everything that hinders or entangles us. That will help us fix our eyes on Jesus and become more like him.

That's why putting your faith into action happens best in community. It's why being a part of the Church is so vital for our spiritual health. I want to share just five quick reasons from our text

about why engaging in the life of a faith community matters. These five things are important, whether you've been here for decades, or you're a college student just checking us out. Here's why I think being a part of a Church matters.

First, it **encourages Spiritual growth**. The church is a place where we can grow spiritually together. We can sharpen one another. A church family can help us let go of distractions and walk away from our sin so we can run towards a deeper relationship with Christ.

Second, the church is a place where we can **endure together**. The call to endurance is hard on its own, but I think it's nearly impossible when you're alone. The church is meant to be a community that bears each other's burdens and gives encouragement and strength in the face of challenges. It's why the first part of our mission statement matters so much. Our mission as a church is **People helping people grow generations of Christ-led influencers**. People helping people. People coming alongside of one another. Being with each other and enduring together.

Third, being part of a church helps us **focus on Christ**. Fixing our eyes on Jesus is vital to our faith and, as the church, we help each other do that. We do it in here when we gather for worship. We do it in Connect Groups in homes and around dinner tables. As a Church, we want to continually direct our attention and affection to Jesus in everything we do.

Fourth, being part of a church helps us **persevere in purpose**. Jesus endured the cross for a greater purpose and as a church, we've been called to look beyond ourselves to ways we can be the hands and feet of Jesus to those around us. Serving them in compassion and love.

Our vision at Sherwood Oaks is **Unleashing the church with the love of Jesus to make an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk people**. We don't want to be a church that's just about gathering in here. We want to be a church that scatters into our world to serve like Jesus served and love like Jesus loved. Help people find and follow Him. We're not interested in being the best church IN our community. We want to be the best church FOR our community.

When people ask me what my vision is for Sherwood Oaks, I think a perfect picture of it is the event we did this past week, the Furniture Giveaway. It's the Church body, coming together, sharing its resources, serving those in need. I told my girls that, if Jesus were walking in Bloomington today, I think he would have been serving at FGA.

We were able to come alongside of over 500 international students, and not only provide them with some furniture they needed, but show them the love of Jesus in a tangible way, and hopefully plant some Gospel seeds in their heart. And, the thing I love most about it is that it truly takes the Church unleashed to put that event on. In fact, if you served or donated a piece of furniture, or helped with FGA in any way, would you stand so we can show our appreciation?

We'll share more about FGA next Sunday, but I mean it when I say that is my favorite week of the year and a perfect picture of where I believe the Lord is leading us here at Sherwood Oaks.

It's one of the ways we're living out our vision. Another way is by partnering with other organizations and ministries that are doing good work. Instead of duplicating the things others are doing to serve others, we want to come alongside of them and help any way we can. And one of our community partners is the Salvation Army. Check out this video [...\(Play Mission Spotlight\)](#)

Finally, being a part of a church family helps us [overcome weariness](#). Putting your faith into action can be hard. It can be emotionally and spiritually exhausting sometimes. The church is a place and a people that can encourage us to not grow weary and lose heart. When we feel discouraged by the world around us or exhausted by swimming upstream in a culture that's rushing downhill, the church is where we can gather to be bolstered and made strong.

I can't tell you how many times I've walked in on a Sunday morning feeling beaten up and bruised by the previous week. But then I worship with my church family. I talk to you in the lobby or you give me a hug. I have the blessing of a unique perspective and I see the way you lean in as we study the Word together. ...And I just try to look past those of you who are sleeping. You all give strength to my faith and help me to refocus on Jesus when I feel distracted.

The Church is a place where we get to do that together. Following Jesus and putting your faith into action is not for the faint of heart, but we don't have to do it alone. God has given us the Church, to help us and for us to help others, as we walk with Him.

So, may we be a place of people helping people throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us.

May we run this race with perseverance together, helping each other fix our eyes on Jesus.

And may we not grow weary or lose heart as we strive to follow Jesus and helps others do the same.