

A CrossFit Faith

Chip Pugh

After the first day my Level I Cert had ended, I immediately called my wife and told her about the experience. I could barely keep from shouting through the phone about how much I believed CrossFit was going to change my life. I remember telling her the reason I believe CrossFit works – because CrossFit is truth. I firmly believe anything that is based upon inherent truth will work. This is why the principles of our training, when combined with intense effort and correct technique, develop the fittest athletes on earth.

It did not take long before our phone conversation turned from physical training to other deeper matters of life. She's pretty good at allowing me to ramble as I spill out my emotions. I guess sometimes I actually make some sense. I continued telling about my belief in the truths that obviously serve as the foundation of CrossFit. And, I was impressed with the fact that these same principles are what have positively affected anything worthwhile in my life. I could see these truths in my athletic career, my coaching career, and even in my deep motivation for living – my spirituality. When something is based on truth – it works!

My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.

- Jimmy Carter

This is when I realized CrossFit is more than a physical fitness program. Since it stands for inherent truth, I believe CrossFit is the ideal training system for life. When we grasp these principles, our faith can be taken to another level – to a CrossFit faith.

A CrossFit Faith is Functional

I have been fortunate as a college athlete and strength coach to be mentored by those who strongly believe in developing real functional strength. When encountering the CrossFit mentality, this aspect was nothing new. I have known for years that cleans, deadlifts, presses and bodyweight calisthenics will produce functional strength. In the Tennessee Tech strength training philosophy we focus on training movements rather than muscles. Pushing and pulling...twisting and squatting...flexion and extension...These multi-joint movements do not simply train muscle groups, but they more appropriately aid in developing many of the ten general physical skills. Focusing a program around movements nullifies the need to think about individual muscle groups. It takes care of the muscles and a whole lot more. More bang for your buck!



Try to find something that works and stay with it.

- Robb Sagendorph

Similarly, our spiritual training ought to be functional. What good is one's faith if it has no application to real life? There have been times I've had to reconsider my study and worship habits. I do not believe God wants me to simply have an intellectual appreciation of facts. He wants me to take this information and apply it to daily life. I want to make sure I'm developing functional spiritual strength, not just flexing spiritual muscles I have had since childhood.

Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

Functional training is much like the solid food I am encouraged to consume as a servant of God. I need solid food, or practical wisdom, to help me battle through daily challenges. And, like the athlete whose training program is filled with functional movements, this practical wisdom decreases my risk of spiritual injury exponentially.

A CrossFit Faith is Intense

Of course, training with functional exercises will only take athletes so far. For optimal benefits, it must be combined with another principle of CrossFit – high intensity. Since intensity is defined as the amount of work completed in a given amount of time, there are mainly two ways of increasing intensity:

- 1) We can increase the amount of work (more force, more weight, more distance).
- 2) We can decrease the time it takes to complete the same amount of work.



Intensity = Work ÷ Time
Raise the Bar!

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24)

Every time I take on the WOD, I make it my aim to beat my previous time or max. It's about competing

Either way, fitness is altered only by pushing prior limits. In other words, we must raise the bar. I have also found this principle to be valid in my spiritual life.

The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.

- T.H. Huxley

to win every day. The days of just “getting a good workout” are over. This mentality is so tempting in our spiritual lives. It can result in going through the motions.



Every day we must achieve a spiritual PR. I want to reach higher heights in my faith. I want to enjoy a deeper sense of peace and satisfaction in knowing I am living for the right reasons. I want to run in such a way as to get the prize.

A CrossFit Faith is Complete

In CrossFit we achieve completeness through the principle of constant variation. Daily variation allows the dedicated CrossFitter to grow in all

essential aspects of fitness equally. This is why the program is so attractive to many athletes, and it is especially appreciated by those in law enforcement and the military. In these pursuits, it is beneficial to be equipped with a diverse set of fitness tools. In the case of a soldier, law enforcement officer, or firefighter, it can be a matter of life or death. A soldier may have the strength of an ox, but if he runs out of gas before the fight is over it could cost him his life. Consequently, he or she cannot specialize in one aspect of physical fitness.

In the Bible, a servant of God is continually compared to a soldier. The spiritual applications are endless concerning organization, leadership, strategy, and methods of combat. It is no different with training preparation. The Bible refers to equipping oneself with the “full armor of God.” The Roman soldier that must have been pictured when this passage was written was equipped with an elaborate uniform for defense in combat.



Therefore take up God’s armor; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. (Ephesians 6:13)

It is interesting to note that each piece of the Roman soldier's equipment described in this passage was used for defense of the front side of the body (breastplate, helmet, belt, shield, and shoes). It is proposed this signifies the stand we are instructed to take against the threat of evil. If the soldier would retreat, he had minimal equipment to defend his back. I must allow the rigors of life to completely develop my faith so I can "stand my ground when things are at their worst."

If we turn our back on specific weaknesses we are essentially leaving ourselves open to the opponent's ammunition. In keeping with the principles of CrossFit, the spiritually fit will avoid specialization, so these weaknesses will not be exposed to the enemy.

You cannot run away from weakness; you must sometimes fight it out or perish; and if that be so, why not now, and where you stand?

- Robert Louis Stevenson

The CrossFit Faith Program

Certainly, we could continue with a number of other illustrations for developing a CrossFit faith. As we said earlier, anything based upon truth will be functional for daily living. I'm confident that most of us have seen these benefits in our lives as we have pursued elite fitness through CrossFit. We must be encouraged to continue looking for other ways to let our physical training affect the most important parts of our lives. In our jobs, family, friendships, and commitments to what we hold true in life, CrossFit holds the key to achieving elite fitness for life.

Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. Bodily fitness has a certain value, but spiritual fitness is essential, both for this present life and for the life to come. (2 Timothy 4:8)

Biography

Chip Pugh is the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Tennessee Tech University where he also operates the local affiliate – CrossFit Cookeville. The former offensive lineman in college earned his Bachelor of Science in Sport Industry and Master of Science in Physical Education at Ohio University. He is a certified member of the National Strength and Conditioning Association and the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches' association. He also holds the Club Coach certification through USA Weightlifting and is a Level I CrossFit Trainer.



He and his wife Nicole live in Cookeville, TN where they use CrossFit to aid in their training for sprint triathlons. They have recently established CrossFit Faith, a ministry based on the link between physical and spiritual fitness, offered within their affiliate website. Their passion is connecting with others who utilize physical fitness to deepen their personal convictions and enhance their faith in God.

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