

# The Endurance of Faith

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*Father, your word is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and it discerns our thoughts. It cuts true and straight in ways that we can't, Father. So Lord, I pray that your word this morning will be proclaimed accurately, that your Spirit would make it powerful in our hearts and lives that we would trust and believe you and that we would run this race with endurance. Father, please grant strength for all of us in both the speaking and in the hearing of your word that we would walk faithfully with you in truth. So Lord, be with us now. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So as you can see from this passage, the primary command, the primary focus of it is a call to endurance. The structure of it focuses on this command: to let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. The rest of what this passage says is how you do that. You do it by considering the witnesses, considering the cloud of witnesses that surround us. The second way to do that is to lay aside everything that hinders you. And the third is to look to Jesus, it's looking to him as the founder and the perfecter of our faith. But the main focus is on running with endurance and, in fact, this is the whole focus of the book of Hebrews. The whole book is one long sermon calling believers to endure in their faith, to hold onto their faith, to persevere through all the trials and temptations and the doubts of life.

This is a very common thing, actually, in Scripture. It's a very common theme and honestly if my brain was working better, we would focus, we would go through a whole bunch of passages of Scripture to show that. Maybe next week because I'm going to do this again next week, not the exact same thing but something next week. But it's really interesting. You look through the epistles and it is incredible how often the call is made to stand firm, to hold fast, to stand up, to endure and to persevere, not just in a worldly sense of just athletes persevering, wow, what a great thing that they endured that race, or a businessman who persevered through the early years of starting their business and, look now they are rich, what an amazing example of endurance. It's not just endurance in general as a good character quality but is the endurance of faith meaning that you have come to faith in Christ and now the call is to continue in that. You see Jesus say that many times where he says, "Those who endure to the end will be saved. Those who persevere to the end will be saved. Those who hold onto their faith." He says, "Those who deny me, I will deny them," he says. So it's not enough to start out on the race, you must finish it. You see it in the book of Galatians. Paul says to the Galatians, they had

initially come to faith but then they were being tempted to be drawn astray by a false Gospel that would damn them, that would condemn them, and he says, "Continue in what you were taught." In the book of Colossians, "Continue steadfast in what you were taught." 1 John, "Remain in these things." Jesus says, "Abide in me and I in you. Remain in my words. Remain in my love."

You see, your faith as I said earlier, is always what's at stake. Your faith, what you believe, that you believe what God has said and what he has promised. Everything that Satan is trying to do is to weaken that, okay? Yes, he wants you to sin. Yes, he wants you to get angry. Yes, he wants you to commit adultery. But that's not his big aim. That's not his big goal. His primary focus is to weaken your faith. He wants you to fall away. He wants to make you ineffective and unfruitful in that faith. He wants to prevent you from proclaiming that faith to the world so that others would be saved. Do you remember when Peter, Jesus says to him, "Peter, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you like wheat," and Jesus says to him, "But I have prayed for you." Do you remember what his prayer was? "That your faith would not fail and that when you are restored, you would strengthen your brothers."

So we'll highlight this more next week. I completely believe that if you are truly saved, you will endure to the end. You cannot be unsaved once you've been saved. But on the flipside, every believer who truly believes will persevere in their faith and perseverance is not like a lazy river boat ride where you just kind of float along and the current takes you, perseverance built into the definition is this idea of overcoming difficulty and trial. No one says that they endured a vacation to Hawaii, but they do talk about how they endured the winters of North Dakota because it's hard. Endurance built into the definition is hardship and suffering.

1 Peter 1, Peter talking to the churches in Asia Minor, he tells them that God is guarding them through their faith. You see, God is the one that perseveres the faith but you also are the one who is believing and continuing to believe. And he says, "Even though for a little while if you are being tested by various trials, for what purpose? So the tested genuineness of your faith will result in praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So these trials come not only, Satan wants to bring trials to break down your faith, God brings the trials to test and to prove your faith genuine, and it is your faith that is always at issue here.

Now in the book of Hebrews here, back to chapter 12:1, he says, "let us run the race with endurance." So he uses the metaphor of a long-distance race. That's what this race of faith is, and it is set out in front of us. The race has been set in front of us. It has been laid out before us. You and I don't determine which direction the race takes, God has laid it out. Each of us has a path before us that we must run. To run this race, to run is to have faith, is to believe, to remain in the faith that has been proclaimed in the New Testament. It's to continue to believe, is what it is basically to run this race, and we are to do it with endurance.

This word for "endurance" is the Greek word "hypomone." This is the most common word in the New Testament for this word translated "perseverance" or "endurance." There are a lot of other words, there are about 11 different words in the New Testament that have been translated "endurance," but this one is the most common. It is translated: endurance, patience, steadfastness, patient enduring, and perseverance. It's a compound word: hypo, mone. Hypo means under, and mone means to remain, or meno is actually the Greek word, to remain. It literally means to remain under; it's to bear up underneath something. The Greek lexicon defines it this way: it's the capacity to hold out or to bear up in the face of difficulty; it is the active state of patient waiting for someone or something. In the Greek world, this was a character trait that was upheld and it really meant to hold out and it had this concept of courageous endurance which defies evil. It's a little bit different than just plain patience, it is active. It includes active and energetic resistance to hostile power. In the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint, this word is used for the phrase "to wait upon God," and it depicts an expectation and a hope on the part of the one who is waiting on God. There are other synonyms used throughout the New Testament: it's to hold fast; to cling to without wavering; to remain; to bear up; to abide; to stand firm. And the opposite of this would be to drift away; to fall away; to give up; to fail to reach the destination; and in the book of Hebrews 10, to shrink back.

So why are there so many calls to endurance in the New Testament? Think about this: why are we called so many times to persevere in the faith? I mean, obviously it's because it's not easy. It's not easy to believe God. I mean, in fact it's so difficult for people to believe God, it takes a supernatural work of God. It is a gift of God to believe and God does not make it easy to believe. He doesn't make it easy to follow him. I mean, it is simple in the sense that you cannot earn your salvation through your works, but to believe that there is a heavenly kingdom waiting for you that you have never seen, and that the way to enter that kingdom is by believing in the Son of God who died on a cross 2,000 years ago and was raised again from the dead, and you have never seen him, you have never heard his audible voice, you have never seen a real miracle in the same way, you haven't seen someone raised from the dead or someone's ear put back in place after it had been cut off, it's not easy to believe. And the world and the flesh and the devil all resist this and to follow Jesus is not simply to just believe that he exists but it's to obey his commands.

So what are his commands? To abstain from sexual immorality. To humble yourself. To not seek money and praise and glory. Everything that your flesh wants, right? Well, that is the battleground that Satan is attacking and if you're going to follow Jesus, you have to deny yourself and follow him. You can't have Jesus, like Jesus said in Matthew 7, you cannot serve two masters. You can't. You cannot serve God and money. You cannot serve God and anything else. True faith, as Pastor Ty has been preaching in James, results, true faith shows itself in obedience to God. Not the other way around. You're not earning salvation by your good works, but your faith will inevitably produce works that are according to God's likeness, that are like Christ inevitably. How can I say that? Because that is what God has promised, because he has promised to make sure that you do. He will bring discipline into your life, he will bring teaching into your life to make sure that you progress in the faith. He is doing that. He will bring other brothers and

sisters to help you. He has given us his word. You have all that you need. He has promised to sanctify you and that is often painful.

Now, when are you the most likely to question your course of action? When is a runner the most likely to want to give up and to not participate in the race? When is he the most tempted to do it? It's right in the middle of the race when he is exhausted and he's going uphill and he can't see the destination or the reward and he starts to wonder, "Is this really worth all this pain?"

Well, the believers in the book of Hebrews were going through some pretty intense trials. Think about this: what would it cost a Jewish believer to follow Christ in his day? What would it cost him? Because the book of Hebrews was written in the first century, I think it was Paul speaking in Hebrew translated by Luke into Greek. That's what one of the early church fathers believed, but we don't really know who wrote the book of Hebrews. But that's what I think. Whoever it was wrote the book of Hebrews to a first century Jewish audience, people who had come out of Judaism. Their whole identity was built on the fact that they were Jews. They were God's chosen people. They had lived their life obeying the law of Moses, doing all the sacrifices, going to the synagogues. Their whole confidence in their internal security was built on the fact that they were Jews who were committed to the law and now this guy comes along and says, "No, the law has been fulfilled. And not only that, sorry Jews, you're not the special ones anymore, now it's all who believe." Gentiles who they looked down upon as dogs are now on equal footing with them. This was anathema to a Jew at that time. They could not stand that idea. That stuff made them angry and they chased Paul all over the Mediterranean trying to get him killed for teaching this kind of a thing.

Not only that, but you throw on top of that the humiliation that you're saying that the Messiah, our King, the apex of Jewish religion, our King was crucified naked on a cross by the Romans who we thought God was going to come and wipe out so we could be top dog. No, you're saying he was crucified by the Romans, and not only that, not only did the Romans crucify him, but our leaders crucified him. This is so offensive. This is humiliating. This is the Gospel that was proclaimed to them. It's not a nice message for those who want to take pride in their own flesh. People hate this. People hate the true Gospel. People hate it, that's why we are so afraid to share it. It's not because, "Oh, I've got a message, I think you're really going to like this." I mean, we share that kind of stuff readily, right? "Oh, but I got a message and this person is not going to like it. They're going to think it's stupid. They're going to think I'm an idiot. They're going to be offended that I believe this, that I believe they are a sinner worthy of hell, that their grandma is worthy of hell. Are you serious?" That's why we're afraid and it makes sense why we are ashamed to speak it because we are afraid of what people will do and think about us.

Think about the Jewish believers at this time. So if you became a believer as a Jew, you are rejecting your whole world. You are rejecting your family and what they raised you to be. You are rejecting, to a degree, your perception of history. You are rejecting your original idea of who God was because in their mind there wasn't room for a Trinity, for

Jesus to be God, to worship a man. I mean, Jesus he is fully God but also fully man. He's still fully God and fully man to this day and they cannot accept this.

Okay, so now consider this. So you have rejected your family, your community, your friends. The synagogue was the center of Jewish culture and you were thrown out of it. So now you are going to have a hard time selling your goods in the marketplace. You're going to have a hard time finding a wife or a husband. Look at chapter 10, verse 32. These believers had already endured a lot. Chapter 10, verse 32, "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened," after you had come to faith, "you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison," the ones that were in prison were believers who were put in prison, "and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one." They had already gone through persecution. They accepted the plundering of their property. You see, when you rejected your community, there was no one there to stand up for your rights. That's what it meant to have faith in Jesus. It wasn't just a private declaration, it wasn't just an opinion, this was your whole identity, your whole life, and everything in your life now became about your faith. So your job, your ability to provide for your family depended on whether or not you could sell goods in your community.

I mean, so these people are struggling with the fear of the loss of their possessions, they are struggling with the ostracism, the shame of being looked down on by everyone, the fear of violent persecution that could break out at any time because there was no one to stand up for them. The early church, I mean, the apostles, all of them were martyred except for John and they tried to kill him too. They had him boiled in oil but somehow he survived it. These were the leaders. Jesus was crucified. Jesus said, "You are not better than your Master. No one is above his Master. If they hated me, they will hate you too." Paul says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ will be persecuted."

So then what's the temptation, then? It's not just that you're tempted, you just want things to be easier, it's you are now being tempted to question whether or not this faith is the right decision, whether or not believing in Christ is truly worth it. And whether or not it's truly real. You start to question, "Okay, is this really the truth?" Think about all the people that you know who have bitterly rejected God. Why have they done that? It's because often they have endured some kind of suffering in the world and they are bitter at God for allowing it to happen. Atheists cannot accept that children die and that there is still a good God. People that walk away from the faith, they have determined that they no longer want to look like an idiot in the eyes of the world, they no longer want to suffer for their faith, they no longer want to miss out on opportunities, they no longer want to deny themselves the passing pleasures of sin.

These are the things that threaten your faith and thus you see in the book of Hebrews a call to hold onto your confidence in Christ, a call to hold fast to it, a call to stand firm in it, to endure and to persevere. And the whole book lays out the proof that Jesus is far superior to the Old Testament, to the old covenant. He walks through the first 10 chapters

essentially proving that Jesus is superior to the angels, he is superior to Moses, he is superior to Aaron, he offered a better sacrifice. Jesus is superior to everything. The old covenant was just shadows and pointed to the reality of Christ. That's what the whole point of the Old Testament was and now Christ is here, that old covenant is obsolete. That is no longer the way to approach God. It must be through Christ alone which, by the way, is what Martin Luther got all worked up about; that it is through Christ alone, faith alone, in his sacrifice alone that you come to God. You don't need a pope, you don't need a priest, you don't need indulgences, you don't need to do penance. No amount of work on your part can bring you to God. It is all completely on the merits of Christ who is far superior and he is the final sacrifice, he is the final priest, and that is what the Reformation was about. And you see the tendency for people to drift from that truth. Just give it a few hundred years and you have a Catholic Church that is so far off base that if you get saved in the Catholic Church, it is in spite of their teaching, not because of their teaching. And that tendency to drift from the faith has come down all the way to this day.

So in the book of Hebrews, again, he goes on for 10 chapters basically saying this: Jesus is superior to the old covenant in every single way. Don't go back to a covenant of works. Don't go back to faith in your efforts. Don't go back to those things. Don't go back to your own sacrifices. You are being tempted by the trials and the struggles of life to give up Christ and to go back to the old covenant, and it would be easy to justify because you can say, "Hey, the old covenant is God's word, isn't it? It's God's truth, isn't it? That's the real God, right? Well, I'm just going back to that one." But what drove them to that was not a theological issue, it was their desire to avoid suffering. That's what drove them to apostasy. That's what drove them to heresy. You see, it usually doesn't go the other way around, you don't usually have heresy that leads to sin, you usually have sin that leads to heresy. People craft their theology to suit their desires. They gather teachers around themselves in accordance with their own desires, that's what Timothy says. So the temptation to deny the truth doesn't come from primarily a theological starting place, it comes from the seed of sin that then gives birth to death in your heart because you want to reinterpret Scripture to suit your preferences.

So the author of this book lays out a case: Jesus is far superior. Don't go back and he gives them a warning. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. After he just got done saying that Jesus is superior to the angels who the Jews held in high regard, they held them in high regard because they saw the angels as having delivered the Old Testament law and so they really revered them, he says in Hebrews 1, that Jesus is superior to them in every way. Chapter 2, verse 1, "Therefore," because he is superior, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution," so in the old covenant delivered by angels, it was the reliable word of God and disobedience to it received just retribution, it received punishment. So since that one was reliable and since that resulted in judgment if you rejected that first covenant, verse 3, "how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." So do you see what he's saying there? He's not saying

the new covenant is a nicer covenant, he's saying that the punishment for rejecting the new covenant is even worse than for rejecting the old covenant. So he says Jesus is superior. Don't reject him because the punishment is actually worse if you reject this great salvation. Do not drift away from it. Pay closer attention to what you've heard from him.

You see it all through the book of Hebrews. There are many different warnings but let's go ahead and jump back down to chapter 10. Actually, do you know what, chapter 3, verse 12. I'm just trying to use my time. Verse 12, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Do you see that? We share in Christ if we believe in him to the end. Jesus says that many believed at first but in time of testing, fall away. It is possible to appear to be saved, to believe that you are, but then when the tests and the trials come and the temptations come, your heart is hardened and thus revealing that you never truly belonged to him and Jesus said, "Depart from me, I never knew you, you workers of lawlessness."

And what is it that hardens your heart? It's the deceitfulness of sin. Can I just say this is why we gather together, this is why we do small groups and home groups, and this is why we are here at church, this is why we do Bible studies. It's not just a nice little club. It's not something that just takes care of your loneliness. It's not something that's just a social gathering. It's not even an interesting self-improvement class. That's not what this is. That we gather together to exhort one another every day as long as it is today so that we will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We are all in this race. We are like runners in this race and we are exhorting each other to keep going. Our goal to win this race is not to beat everyone else but it's to finish. To win the race is to finish it and we want everyone in this room to finish the race.

Look at what he says in verse 16, "For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?" Okay, so those people had enough faith to follow Moses through the Red Sea, they started out on the path, but look at what he says, "And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?" So look, he's using faith and obedience interchangeably. He is using unbelief and disobedience interchangeably.

So the Israelites were wandering around in the wilderness, immediately within the first couple of years they show up on the edge of Canaan. God basically tells them, "Go and take the land." So they send 12 spies to go spy out the land to see where it was. They brought back some of the fruit and they gave a report and the report was, "Yes, the Promised Land is a very good land, full of milk and honey. Here's some fruit, check it out. But the people that live there are really strong and there are giants that live there. We can't take them." There was only two guys that said, "No, God has given us this land. God promised this land." Okay, that's faith, by the way. God said, "I'm giving you this

land." These two guys said, "I believe God therefore let's go and follow him and do it." The other people were like, "No, they are too strong." And the people believed the other spies, the 10 spies that doubted God.

So because they rebelled against Moses, God swore that that generation would not enter the Promised Land because they did not believe. Their unbelief led to disobedience and so, "they were not able to enter," verse 19, "because of unbelief." Chapter 4, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." Now it's so interesting, so much of our counsel to one another is to try to get us to stop being afraid, right? So much of what we tell each other is to reduce fear. I don't think the author of Hebrews got that memo, you know, "Hey, Paul. Hey, Paul, don't say that. That's going to make people anxious." I personally don't like delivering this kind of a message. I initially started studying Hebrews 12 for it to be like this nice, low pressure, yes, endure, pep talk. But you read the book of Hebrews and it is intense. To fail to endure is not an option. To fail to endure, to give up your faith is not an option. "I am fearful for you if you are contemplating giving up your faith. I am fearful if you want to give up and I am exhorting you today to press on so that you will not fail to obtain the salvation that was promised."

Verse 2 it says this, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest." This is why it's so important to endure. This is why it's an urgent thing to endure and we have to recognize that there are things that will prevent us from enduring, namely sin. We don't give up sin to bolster our pride so that we feel better about ourselves. This isn't a personal improvement project. That's not what this is about. This isn't self-improvement. This isn't, "Rah-rah, yes, we did it! We built that bridge, yay! We won the Super Bowl! Boy, that was hard!" No, that's not what this is.

"Today, if you hear his voice," he says, "do not harden your hearts." Verse 11, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Okay, it's so intense it should make us a little bit on edge. There is a certain tension in the Christian life that we have confidence in God and yet God doesn't let us just kind of relax. He calls us to endure, to persevere, to press on.

But look at verse 14, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." That's to our faith. To what we believe. Hold fast to it. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." You're not on your own in this. You're not on your own. It's not all on your shoulders to endure. You have a high priest who sympathizes with you, who loves you, who cares for you. And really what it



means to endure is to always go to him, always look to him, always trust in him, to not throw away your confidence in Jesus. If you are truly a believer, you will. You won't give up. You will fight through all the temptations and the struggles. You will work to repent. Why? Because you believe that you have a great high priest who has made the sacrifice for you, who is empowering you, who is running with you, and as chapter 12, verse 2 says, he has run the race ahead of us. He has shown us how to do it.

So next week we'll spend a little bit more time in 12:1 and 2 talking about exactly how do we endure. How do we endure. So let's read chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 one more time.

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

You listen to the witnesses, you lay aside hindrances, and you look to Jesus. That's how you endure.

Let's pray.

*Father, I pray that you would make your word do its work in our hearts, Lord. Lord, that this would spur us on to confidently seek Christ and to come before your throne because we know that you are merciful and we know that you are faithful, we know that your blood has covered every sin and that all we must do is believe. But Lord, there are so many trials that test this faith and so many temptations that would cause us to forsake, that would cause anyone who does not truly believe to forsake you. Lord, I pray that as the trials come, that it would prove our faith is genuine because it is strengthened by the trial, not weakened. I pray for those who are beginning to doubt, beginning to fall away. I pray, Lord, that you would show them the glory of God in the face of Christ, that their eyes would see that Christ is worth the loss of all things and that all we must do is to believe and follow for the remission of our sins, Lord. You are good and you are the one who empowers us to do this so please do this work in our hearts. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*