

## Endurance – A Needed Quality

*The Book of Hebrews*

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 12:1-2  
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Well, tonight we're in Hebrews 12 and actually just the first two verses, and the title goes as follows, "Endurance – A Needed Quality." Right, endurance, a needed quality.

Hebrews 12:1 really brings together chapter 11 and tells us what therefore we must do. You see it, "Therefore." Why does it say "Therefore"? Because it's taking hold of all of what chapter 11 has taught us through that body of people that are called here that cloud of witnesses, as though we're sort of surrounded, we're enveloped by people whose lives are speaking to us, speaking volumes to us. If you remember, we said, actually, that chapter 11 is a bit of a rebuke, a rebuke to people who hadn't learned, hadn't got hold of the fact what's looked for here. Well, he would say if we're looking to the Old Testament for our inspiration, we'll try this. What were these people about? Well, they're about faith. They weren't going backwards, they were going forwards and they had even less light, less revelation than we do. They were still waiting for a promise to come. They didn't have the good things that we now have and the abundance that we possess, and yet showed such courage and such willingness to suffer. They are to inspire us even though, in a way, in context, they form something of a rebuke to us.

So we draw that conclusion from them, "Therefore," and now it's no good. Kind of looking back at what's been and nodding in approval and saying, "Well, they're wonderful, aren't they?" No, it's now our turn, "we also." This is now us, our names. Not David now. Not Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Gideon, who in their own day did exploits, subdued kingdoms, quenched the sword wherever it might be in the fire. Our turn now.

"We also," we're to be like them. Not look back on them and with fondness and with a kind of nostalgia or, "Weren't they great?" Pity about us. They would say, no, we're to follow like them and so this is what he now sets out for us. Just as these people and how they lived are a motivation to us, well, he actually takes it beyond them, doesn't he, because he says, "Well, they're actually motivated by a promise that still lay a little way off." We can be motivated by a promise that's come very much true in our own day. They, in a way, by faith were still looking onto what the Lord would do through his Son. This better thing which it speaks of in verses 39 and 40, God providing something better for us. We're actually going to have the Lord Jesus Christ having lived within memory.

He's been there. People we know saw him. And the apostles are reporting what he said, what he taught. We have that.

This good thing is now in our possession because they were not going to be made perfect. Their testimony, all that they stood for was incomplete. It wasn't going to be completed and fulfilled until the Lord Jesus came and he's now come. And he's not a shadowy figure, somebody a little way off. No, we now look unto him. We look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Faith, that's what they had in Hebrews 11 when they didn't have all the light that we have. We've got it in clarity. We've now got the whole thing revealed to us. Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of faith, our faith, and he is now clearly in our sights.

And where is he now when we look unto him? Not still needing to be sacrificed, that's already been one of the big themes that the writer has dealt with and we're not looking for him and his blood to be shed again and again. If you're looking for him now, he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. That is where he is because he is the Son of God and, of course, that's been one of the lessons right at the beginning of this letter that the writer has been saying to the people.

So we're looking to him and as we look to him, sat at the right hand of God but he wasn't always there, was he? He was here. He was living on earth. He was among his people like David was there and Samson was there. Well, so was he there in a greater way, greater than David and greater than Samson and greater than any of the prophets who was there. Now what was characteristic of him? What important thing could we learn from him to help us now as we, perhaps on the back foot and shrinking away and looking at the trials and temptations and beginning to feel weak and wanting to hide a little bit away?

Well, it's endurance, isn't it? Endurance. That is the quality, the quality that he had in abundance. Indeed, those in Hebrews 11 had that in abundance too, though not quite in the quality and quantity of our Lord Jesus. That patience. That resolve. That being ready to put up with all the things that are running against you. The scourgings, the mockings, the trials. Ready to do exploits, to be bold in speech, to be bold in action. And how are we to carry that through? What do we need inside? What kind of quality of character? '

Well, endurance, that's a word, isn't it? That conveys something of that willingness to keep going despite everything, willingness to proceed in a course of action despite hostility and obstacles and people against us and circumstances against us. And you see, it's rendered in English in our Bible version, there's endurance, it's there in verse 1, running with endurance the race set before us. It's there again in verse 2 about our Lord Jesus Christ who endured the cross. And really verse 3 belongs with this verse 2 as it looks forward to what's in verse 4 and follows, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself."

He carried on and he pressed on. Whatever was there against him and nothing greater was there, nothing more than you would wish to shrink back from than the cross. No, he endured that and all that was surrounding that, and all that it meant in all of its particulars

and proceeded on, kept going, didn't stop. And that's endurance, isn't it? That resolve, that steel, that putting up with difficulty but not being dissuaded from your course of action, that line that you're following.

Well, what can we learn? First heading: what needs to go? Because that's what the writer has here, hasn't he? What needs to go? If we're going to follow, if we also, if we're going to learn from the cloud of witnesses, these people from the past, then we've got to start here. Our Lord didn't have to do any of this but we do and so did they. They were imperfect representations of endurance but there is weight to be laid aside and sin which sullies and ensnares us, which is to be laid aside.

If we're going and here the image, of course, of of running, pilgrimage in chapter 11, a more sort of steady, a more kind of resolve in that way and progress that we're making, well, now he's upped the pace. It's running now and it's helpful to his illustration to think about running and what hinders us in running. If we had to run fast and run this race and there it is, and there's the destination, there's the finishing line, why, it's heaven, isn't it? Death, getting to death with a better resurrection still in our grasp.

And he tells us, "Well, there are things which must be deliberately laid aside. Let us lay aside, let's do this thing." And that's an exhortation, isn't it? Let us do this thing. And the writer doesn't say, "Well, you get on with this." He's saying, "Well, I include myself in this. I'm part of this. I'm surrounded by these same witnesses too. I'm looking unto Jesus and trying to learn what I need to learn and I stand with you as we altogether aim to part company with every weight, every conceivable weight and all kinds of sin which so easily ensnares us."

Well, picture this, isn't it, if you're trying to run. Maybe you've given up trying to run, that's not the thing you do these days. Well, whatever you try to do, moving maybe a bit quickly for something, for some reason, you don't want to be weighed down. You don't want you're sort of boots full of lead weight. You don't want a huge backpack just full, I don't know, of drinks and builder's rubble or something like that. That would slow you down. It would slow anybody down, slow the fastest sprinter. If you invited him to run his 100 meters and his personal best and, "Oh, by the way, you've got to do it with your boots full of this and perhaps put some iron cladding around you, and this great big backpack." I don't think he'll get anywhere near his personal best.

Or if you were running and there's a briar patch, a wonderful briar patch, "Well, run through that." Well, run through that? You'd say, "Don't fancy that at all here." You're going to get your feet all snagged in the briars. You'd trip over. You'll be scratched and grazed and will emerge out of that, you'll have been slowed down immeasurably. You just wouldn't do that. You wouldn't carry all that weight and you wouldn't think, "Well, I'll choose this way through this briar patch. I'll run straight into it." The result will be, well, perhaps rather amusing maybe, I don't know, but it would be rather painful for the person who actually was doing that.

So there are things to lay aside here. If we're going to run and that's the picture, isn't it, we're going to run, we want to actually be doing this, not crawling, we don't want to be struggling in such a way. We want to be running. Conviction. Confidence.

Determination. That's what it's telling us here. So weights, what has to go there? We think of burdens, burdens that we carry, burdens perhaps we don't even realize that we're carrying. Well, it's the day, isn't it, in which, you know, coronavirus and being a big overweight is not a good and happy mix and even our own Prime Minister, perhaps, has experienced that at first hand and he's now lecturing us as he's lectured himself. Lose some weight. You'll get on better with it. We see pictures of him, don't we, there jogging and trying to do the very thing he's telling us all ought to do.

Burdens, you're just carrying just all the time, as it were, weights that you don't need. Maybe you haven't even thought about it, you haven't even really checked up on yourself to see, "Just what am I carrying here? Is this something I don't think about often enough that's slowing me down?" Many thoughts we could put to this but we could think of, well, worldliness. Just worldliness. Worldliness in its kind of generality, having our treasure and our hopes in this world. We sometimes don't even realize that's where it is, that we're kind of living between two worlds. We've got one foot in that camp and one foot in the Lord's camp and it's going to slow us down.

You can imagine, can't you, trying to run a race while you're sort of running it partly in that direction, partly in this. It's going to be rather tortured and rather embarrassing, rather difficult to sustain. Worldliness, that you're looking for this world's approval, this world's success. Your love is really of this world. You see, there's the Lord who for the joy that was set before him, he was looking ahead. He saw heaven. He saw the throne of God and him sat at the right hand of God. That made what he was suffering in the present to be, well, worthwhile. It was to be endured.

But if we're not convinced that that's where our treasure is, actually our treasure is here on earth and we want this world's applause, this world's approval, this world's benefits and comforts and ease, well, then we won't be running anything like as well as we should. If we're looking for that success even at a modest level of success and really pining for that in this world in the here and now, we'll not be so careful about the soul. We're not cultivating a view of heaven so avidly. We've discounted heaven. We've pushed it away and so sacrifices in the here and the now, well, we won't be so willing to make them. We won't be so willing to cast off weights. We'll cling to them and our progress to heaven will be slower.

If we're looking to some vindication in the here and now for the righting of all the wrongs this side of the grave, well, that can slow us down. It's not going to happen. It will happen in heaven but it won't happen here on earth. And there will be many things, grievances, sadnesses, disappointments that we might have to carry and we can spend too much energy trying to right those wrongs. And where they're still working within us somewhere, unresolved things and to become aware of that, that they're slowing us down and to begin to address those things.

We are to be liked by the world. How much? But that's been a snare, much as a snare to the wider church, isn't it? We want to be liked by the world. We want the world to look on and say, "Well, we like what you're doing." Well, that's not the way, is it? It listens to what we have and it doesn't like what we're doing. It doesn't love what we're saying. Doesn't want to be told about hell. It doesn't want to be told about sin. It doesn't want to be told about repentance and losses and such things as we're doing and talking about here. Worldliness, this world, getting everything crammed in, in this world, being happy in this world to the detriment of our spiritual well-being and our running this race.

Fear. Fear can be a burden. Carry it, keep carrying it, we've carried it all our lives in some fashion. It will make us hide away, not do so many exploits and we won't be found there and we have to choose not to be giving into fear, to come against it because it distorts our choices, it kind of twists up our thinking in that way. It sort of pulls us away from running as clearly as we should for the Lord.

And here, putting it more negatively, it's not so much we're looking for the world to like us as the world not to hate us. We're not willing it to be angry with us or to dislike us. The sad fact is, as a Christian you don't need to open your mouth, it's already the world's decided it hates you and its dislike will be there vented against you.

So we look at those burdens and we could mention lots and lots of other burdens and we work out before the Lord how we are going to address this. There's not an answer, is there, over night? This isn't a quick fix but the recognition of it, the willingness to address it is a good start. It is a good start, a good start to laying aside these things.

And then there are sins, aren't there, that just ensnare us. They catch us. They hold onto us. Covetousness, the desire for other things, isn't it? Well, I can sort that under worldliness, true enough, but just talking about it there as a kind of explicit, not a kind of more invisible under the radar but it's just there. Oh, coveting, we're wanting what other people have and there's a discontent, a dissatisfaction that just eats us up, ensnares us.

Jealousy. Hatred. Basic things like this, a desire for vengeance that drains away our energy, entangles us, holds us fast there. We need to cast these things away.

Lust. Desires that entangle in that way, a lust that can morph into very very unhappy addictions. And we're to choose against those things. Remember how when we were looking at sanctification some little time back just in Colossians 3 and just taking a few verses from there, verses 5 to 9. "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds." This idea of putting off, this idea of pushing this away and wanting nothing more to do with it, an ensnarement that we want to break through these briars and hack at them there so we've got then free movement forward.

So that's what needs to go, just a brief summary, but secondly: endurance needed, that quality of character, that steel, that mettle within, that which means that we're going to be firm with ourselves. We're going to be firm. We're going to deal with ourselves, take ourselves in hand. Not let ourselves carry those weights and get ensnared with those sins. That endurance which speaks of that quality of resolve, why, that willingness to endure pain, isn't it, and much of what it is, is pain. It's painful to part with sin. It's painful to address the weights that we so easily and for so long might have carried.

But endurance will help us to ride through the trials, help us to get through the challenges, to take the risks, to be prepared to speak up, speak out when there's going to be cost in doing it. A willingness to keep running despite the setbacks, despite the dangers, the opposition, the trials. A willingness to run despite the obvious returns and positive feedback for doing the things that we do.

Well, endurance is fed by faith, isn't it? It's all part of the same story here, that faith looks onto these things which we may not be able to see right here, right now. But faith looks to the Lord Jesus, by faith seeing him at the right hand of God. Sees him there. Well, how did he get there? He got there because he was raised. How did that happen? Well, it was the power of God. What did it prove? Well, it proved he was the Son of God. And so we're looking unto somebody very very impressive, very very important, very very powerful and faith looks at that and is inclined to agree that here is someone well worth following, well worth living for, that if this is the pathway he went, then that's the pathway that I'm going to go too because I know the outcome of this. He was raised and I know where he's gone, to heaven, and I know he's promised to me that that's where you will be. "Where I am, there you may be also. The glory that I have I want You, Father, to give to them, the glory I had with You before the foundation of the world."

And he's promised that to us and he endured in order to make that happen for us, and so faith is looking on all of these things and we stand here, get a telescope, see the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God. But we can't. How do we know this? Well, we read it in the Bible. Well, how is this? Well, this makes sense and these eyewitnesses, well, there you've got to work hard to tell an eyewitness that you didn't really see what you saw. There are lots of them and they all saw the same thing, and they saw him raised and they saw him ascend, didn't they? They were there at that time. The apostles, they saw him taken up in a cloud and there they were lingering a bit too long upon watching where he had gone and the angels had to remind them when he's going to come back and you'd better get back to Jerusalem because he's promised you the Holy Spirit there. And so they returned to Jerusalem rejoicing.

Faith looks at all of those things that the Bible teaches us and nods in agreement and says these things are true. And that is really quite some implication and that I have therefore a future which makes this world what it offers seem as nothing. What is this worth? What is the world's approval worth compared to what he's going to give me when I get to heaven where I see him at the right hand of God in that way when where he owns me as his own child when he brings me into the joy of his heaven.

So faith feeds endurance. It adds to it. It's part of it. It's what is there. That's why faith without action isn't really faith. Faith means we count the cost. Faith means obedience when there are difficulties attached to it. But faith looks, doesn't it, at the Lord Jesus who is here on earth. We know where he is now, he's in the heaven and that's an inspiration but actually what he did on earth is an inspiration. It's what we're looking at, isn't it? It's why it tells us about him who endured the cross, despising the shame. That all had to proceed the crown, didn't it? It was the suffering. And the writer is saying to us when you look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, he knows what he's doing. He can resource you in this. He's at the right hand of God where he provides for his people.

Look what he suffered before he got there. Refer back to Hebrews 11 and what the people there suffered, and we read of one of those, didn't we, in 2 Chronicles 24. There was Zechariah coming to the king and rebuking the king for departing from the word of God, and he was one of those who was stoned. We read of that happening, don't we there, these who were stoned and were sawn in two. We think that's what happened to Isaiah, by the way.

For here, focus back to the Lord Jesus. There were those great examples but now the greatest example. If you want to see somebody who suffered, endured hardship, shame, we look at him. We want to look at somebody who, well, what opposition he encountered but how he always and when the Pharisees went to him with the questions they went to him, "Teacher, we now that You always teach the truth. You're not swayed by men's opinions." How right they were though they were hypocrites, but they were writing what they said. Yes, he was there amidst his enemies teaching and preaching without fear of man.

Well, we look unto him, then, don't we? The Lord Jesus Christ and we look for all he suffered and we see that and it's hurtful and it's painful but it reminds us that if we're going to get to glory, that that's the kind of endurance, that's the kind of character that we also need to have. Well, we could just do a sample of what the Lord suffered when he endured the cross and despised the shame. I'm turning to Mark 15. I'm going to read from verse 27 to verse 32. We read this. We learn that, "With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!' Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him." And that's just a little portion, isn't it? We went through all that he endured, the trials, the insults, the mockery, the beatings, the scourgings, and that's even before he's borne the weight of our sins when God's anger is visited upon him.

Well, we look, don't we, there and we can't bear the weight of sin, that was for him to have to endure that, but we can learn from those mockings and that blasphemy and the

way in which people made fun. To make fun of him, don't we think then in the midst of his death what heartlessness, what callousness, but also folly. And that, well, less than that actually is leveled against us, isn't it, as believers? That we have that thrown back at us as they do on occasion, people are thinking that. They're not saying it, we know you're thinking it and you're thinking of us as fools, what we believe and what we do. And we have to be like the Lord, that it is and has to be compared to the greater work that we are about and our Lord and the joy set before him, then it is as nothing. It is to be just put on one side, that we bring our mind back to what we're meant to be doing. That we hear that but it's not going to affect us, it's not going to stop us, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ's example and part of his legacy to us. And when we are called bigots, hate-filled people, racist, which everybody is these days, isn't it? That is to be nothing to us. That is to mean nothing to us, that we don't interrogate ourselves and just go around bearing that reproach and just absorbed but that we dismiss it, we pass through it, we move beyond it, and we take heart from our Lord's example.

Do we look to that example? Are we in the Bible enough to know what that example is? Are we following his life? Are we studying the way that he endured the revilings? How with extraordinary poise, with extraordinary grace that he dealt with that kind of language, that kind of treatment, that kind of behavior, does it inspire us? I hope it does. Does it rebuke us? It certainly does, doesn't it? But nevertheless, the inspiration that's there, the comforts he denied himself, the pain-free life that he just parted company with. But we look at that example, it's immense, isn't it? We look unto him as immense because he's immense and because he's the author and finisher of faith because he's at the right hand of God. He knows how to bring help to those who are enduring their own much more minor versions of the cross, much more minor versions of shame that they're having to endure. And it can give us grace to be able to despise it too, to look at it as nothing, to not let it interrupt our sleep and our comforts, to be able to proceed through this world and to follow on. Not us walking at a snail's pace but running that our life is one of conviction living for him.

So that's a needed quality and it's found, isn't it, in abundance in the example of the life of our Savior as we have it laid out for us in Scripture and may he help us to look unto him, that we will follow in the pattern of those servants of Hebrews 11 and that we also would lay aside all the weights, the sins, and run with endurance that race that is set before us.



## **ENDURANCE – A NEEDED QUALITY: Hebrews 12:1-2.**

### **(Sermon Summary)**

**Reading: Hebrews 11: 32 – 12:2.**

Hebrews 12:1 is the follow-up to Chapter 11. The 'therefore' is what we are to come away with by way of a conclusion from that chapter. The people of Chapter 11 are the cloud of witnesses. Their example stands as a rebuke to the sluggish believers that the writer was addressing and were showing more faith, even though they had less light. Here he shows us that these people were eager to get rid of sin and everything that stopped them obeying God. They are a strong motivation to us. But the greatest motivation of all is the example of the Lord Jesus Himself. His example and His attitude to difficult challenges and trials is our best example. We are to look to Him. He has the resources as the author and finisher of our faith, now sat at the right hand of God, to help us here on earth in our pilgrimage.

The quality that our Lord had was, among many things, endurance. The word appears in verse 1, 2 and 3. This means the ability to put up with difficulties and obstacles and not to give in or go backwards. It means that we have steel and resolve.

#### **1. What needs to go**

The same things that the believers in Hebrews 11, people like Moses, got rid of are the same things that we need to get rid of today. There are things that are to be deliberately cast off or jettisoned. These are weights that slow us down and sins that entangle us. The picture has been one of pilgrimage in Chapter 11 but now it turns to a race. We are to imagine ourselves trying to run when weighed down with things or when our feet are tangled up in something like a briar.

When we think of weights, we might think of general burdens that we carry and which stop us showing the resolve and decisiveness that we need to show to do the will of God. They might be particular attitudes or dispositions that we have. We might name one of those as worldliness. We are too much taken up reasoning and thinking like the world of non-Christians. We are looking for their approval more than we are looking for the approval of God. This is what happens when the joy we are looking for is not the joy of heaven but the joy of the earth. We are looking for satisfaction and fulfillment here on earth rather than in heaven above. This is not how Lord behaved and reasoned. We might be looking for some success on earth that gets in the way of spiritual aims and

priorities. We may be looking for vindication that takes up too much of our emotional energy. We might be wanting too much to be liked by the world.

Another weight that slows down our serving God and running the race is fear. This prevents us being bold or courageous and makes us hide away. We might fear the world's anger and dislike and this stops us doing the will of God so willingly and openly.

Then there are sins that take away endurance from us and hinder our resolve. They can be straightforward lusts. These desires entangle to the extent that they can actually become addictions. We have to put these off and choose against them (Colossians 3:5-9). Covetousness can also get in the way and breed discontent so that we are always looking for peace and satisfaction in other things. Jealousy and hatred can also drain away our spiritual resolve and absorb us in thinking about other people in a negative way.

## **2. Endurance needed**

We need to be able to endure. We need that quality in our character which has true grit and steel. We have to be firm with ourselves, with our sins and the various weights that hinder us. We have to be able to overcome the trials and the obstacles, just as our Lord did. It also means that we have to be prepared to enter into danger if necessary. We have to be willing to pursue what we know to be the will of God, despite dangers, opposition, trials and setbacks. We have to follow that course even though there is no positive feedback.

Endurance grows where there is faith. It gets built into us when we are clearly looking at the things that are unseen and which lie ahead. Our Lord knew that there was the resurrection and the joy of being received into glory and sitting at the right hand of God. This was something He always kept in view and that is what we must do as we follow Him.

Endurance observes carefully the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and is eager to learn from Him and do likewise. It pays very careful attention to all the things He suffered through His death on the cross and the way He was treated there such as in Mark 15:27-32. He faced people blaspheming Him and reviling Him and so must we. He despised the shame. It was as nothing to Him. It must be reckoned the same by us. We are called bigots, hate-filled people or racists. It has to have no effect on us and what we believe and what we do.

Do we study His example in Scripture? Does it inspire us? Do we want to model our lives on the qualities He showed, such as His endurance? He has resources to help us to follow Him. Are we willing to believe this as we suffer shame for Him?