

THE TEACHING *Legacy of* *Derek Prince*

ENDURING UNDER TRIALS

In Matthew 24 and Mark 13 Jesus gave a prophetic preview of the situation that will exist in the world immediately prior to His return. Today we are seeing around us many of the conditions He predicted. But Jesus also gave directions to believers for survival in these situations. The key requirement can be stated in one word: endurance. Although it is often translated differently in various translations—“patience”, “longsuffering” (KJV), “perseverance” (NASB), or “stand firm” (NIV)—the best single translation is probably “endurance.”

To begin, let’s look at two specific passages. In each instance, Jesus is speaking of the breakdown of relationships and the widespread persecution of Christians. First, in Matthew 24:

Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. v. 12

When people become lawless, they also become loveless. Too often we think of love as free and unin-

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hibited, requiring no laws or discipline. But that is incorrect. Love and discipline go hand in hand. When discipline and law break down, love grows cold. It is significant that the word for “love” in this passage is agape, which is essentially the love of Christians. Jesus is not talking about the love of the world growing cold, but

rather the love of Christians growing cold. That is a much more serious situation.

After foretelling this lack of love, Jesus adds this admonition in verse 13:

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

In order to be saved, we must go all the way to the end—and that will require endurance on our part.

In Mark 13:12–13, we read a similar prediction and admonition:

Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Again, we see a very sombre picture: treachery and disloyalty within family relationships, and Christians being hated by all men. That is why Jesus said we must endure.

WHAT ENDURANCE PRODUCES

Some Scriptures speak generally about endurance and the tests we must all face; some offer principles on how to endure. First in Romans 5:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [endurance]; perseverance, character.

v. 1–4

Endurance produces character that has stood the test. In essence, we are talking about the forma-

tion of our character. We can rejoice (boast, glory and exult) in tribulation because only tribulation produces endurance. Endurance, in turn, produces proven character.

In James 1:2 we read, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." We need to praise God that He counts us worthy of the trials we go through, bearing in mind that the trial is always for our own good. James goes on to explain how this seeming paradox works:

Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [endurance]. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:3-4

James is saying that if we go through the test and hold out, it will shape every area of our character and personality. It will make us complete, fully-rounded Christians.

One of the great proving grounds for our character development is the close, committed fellowship where we meet every week with the same small group of people. As we share our lives in this context, it often becomes uncomfortably clear that there are some areas in our character that have never been dealt with. If we fail to expose ourselves to others, we can deceive ourselves about untested areas in our character and back off every time we face a test that would expose those areas.

Somebody has said that fellowship is "Roof off, walls down." We don't mind getting the roof off because God sees through the roof anyhow, but we can get pretty uncomfortable when we let the walls down so our fellow Christians can see in. There is no greater proving ground for our Christian character than close, committed fellowship with believers.

THE TESTS

What are the tests that we will have to go through? One very simple outline is found in Matthew 13, the well-known parable of the sower who spread the seed. In this parable, Jesus speaks about the different kinds of soil, each representative of a different kind of person who hears the Word of God.

Describing how some seed falls by the wayside and is devoured by birds before it can enter the ground, and other seed falls on rocky ground and

among thorns, Jesus explains the type of person represented by each of these situations.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Matthew 13:19

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The seed never gains entrance into this person's life at all, but just lies on the ground until a bird comes along and picks it up.

Jesus then goes on to describe two kinds of persons who did receive the seed and began to produce fruit. However, the fruit eventually came to nothing because they failed to pass the tests to which they were subjected. The first group were those who had "stony places"; the second group were those who had "thorns."

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. Matthew 13:20-22

Very simply stated, there are two kinds of tests: when life is too hard and when it is too easy. The first test is persecution; the second is prosperity. Some people cannot stand the persecution; some cannot stand the prosperity. Some people can make it when they are persecuted, but when God blesses them with a beautiful home, two cars and a boat, they get much more wrapped up in the things of this world than in the Kingdom of God.

There are others who receive the Word with joy, speak in tongues, give their testimony everywhere, and prophesy—they bask in the blessings of God. But a few months later you can't find them because the moment opposition came, they just wilted away.

The truth is, we have to endure both tests. We will be tested by tribulation and also by success, and we must hold out through both. Let me give four suggestions concerning the biblical way to achieve endurance.

1. A FIRM COMMITMENT. The first one is that we make a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ without any reservations. This is the way a normal Christian walk should begin.

Here are two scriptural exhortations to new converts. The first, in Acts 11:23, records what Barnabas said to a new group of Christians in the city of Antioch:

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

The key phrase, “purpose of heart,” indicates that you must really make up your mind to stick with the Lord, regardless. If your friends don’t, you will. Even if your family doesn’t, you will. That is the purpose of heart we need.

Then, in Acts 14:22, we find Barnabas and Paul exhorting new converts in a similar way:

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

New converts need to know there is no other way into the kingdom of God except through tribulation. I understand “the kingdom of God” in two senses: There is the future kingdom, which Jesus will bring and establish; but there is also the kingdom that we enter and live in now. And it is through much tribulation that we come into kingdom living. We will be subject to pressure in every area of our lives.

When people come to the Lord, we owe it to them to warn them that if they are going to move into

kingdom living, it will be through tribulation and opposition. It is unfair to tell new converts that when they come to Jesus all of their problems are solved. The fact is, they will have problems as Christians that they never before knew existed. A firm commitment

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to the Lord Jesus Christ will be necessary to endure these trials.

2. FOCUSING ON THE ETERNAL. The second principle of endurance is found in Hebrews 11:27, which refers to Moses, who grew up in Egypt destined to inherit the throne as the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter. He had education, wealth, social privilege—in fact, everything the world could offer. But at the age of forty he turned his back on it, fled from Egypt, and spent the next forty years looking after a few sheep in the back side of the desert. The verse says of Moses:

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

That is the essence of endurance: seeing Him who is invisible.

Faith is the faculty that enables us to see that which is invisible. It is related to the unseen, “*the conviction of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1, NASB). If we are to hold out, the unseen world must be more real to us than the seen. Otherwise, we will fall in love with the world system and turn our back on the unseen realities of God’s kingdom.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, we read:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

It is important to see that affliction only works out God’s purpose for us while we keep our eyes on the unseen. The unseen is the eternal and does not change. Spend time with your Bible. Read it, meditate on it, live in it, believe it, ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to you. Soon it will become so real to you that nothing in this world could tempt you to be disloyal to Jesus Christ.

3. NOT GIVING UP. In addition to the need for a firm commitment to the Lord and keeping our eyes on the unseen, there is a third principle: if you fail, don’t give up. One of the devil’s cleverest tricks is to say, “You are a failure. You might as well give up, because God has given up on you.” Don’t believe

him—he is a liar. In Psalm 37 David wrote:

*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,
and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall
not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him
with His hand.* vv. 23–24

Remember that if you fall, you will not be utterly cast down because the Lord has your hand. David knew that. Even though he had fallen terribly and tragically in the matter of Bathsheba, God forgave and restored him. He could say, “Even when you fall, don’t give up. God will pick you back up.”

There was a man in the New Testament who fell, too. His name was Peter. Jesus spoke to Peter, knowing that he was going to deny Him three times:

*And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan
has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But
I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.”*
Luke 22:31–32

Jesus did not pray that Peter would not deny Him, but that his faith would not fail. Jesus was saying to Peter, “*Even though you deny Me, your faith will not fail. You will fall, but you will get up again.*” In the same way, if you fall, just stretch out your hand by faith, and let the Lord pick you up. Don’t give up; the Lord has not given up on you.

4. AN EYE ON THE PRIZE. The fourth principle is: remember the prize-giving. Not all the issues of life

are settled now. There are some things that remain for the future.

Paul writes his testimony of faith from his jail cell: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). Those three things go together. If you are going to keep the faith, you must fight the fight. Faith is a fight. You cannot escape the fight and keep the faith. You must fight the fight to finish your race. Paul did all three: he fought the fight, he finished the race, and he kept the faith. From then on, he was waiting for the prize-giving.

*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of right-
eousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will
give me on that Day.* 2 Timothy 4:8

Paul was awaiting trial and probable execution at the hands of a very unjust ruler. But he said, “That is not the last word. There is going to be another judgment day—a prize-giving day—and the Judge will be absolutely just.”

Some of us will be rather surprised to see who gets the gold medal. It will not be based on the speed at which we ran, but rather the faithfulness and steadfastness with which we served. If we will stand the test, we will come out like gold refined by fire. ■

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