

#253 "Endurance"

T.H.R.I.V.E. part 6

By Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

In heaven, all that is unjust will be made right, all that is broken will be fixed, all that hurts will cease causing pain, and those who have died in Christ will be reunited. But until that day, we live in a world of trouble because Satan is its prince (Ephesians 2:2). He loves pain and trouble, especially if it can discourage believers. This is why we must endure, and, when trials come, we should not shrink back but rather embrace them with joy knowing that God is able to use them to strengthen our faith, sanctify the inner man, and increase our character and hope. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Endurance results in increased holiness. Though the sanctifying process may not always be pleasant, the end result of holiness and growth should bring us great joy.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says,

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This passage is typically compared to an athlete laying aside any hindrance, weight, or entanglement so that he can run the race to win. Surely, we should cast sin aside and remove all that could compromise our mission, but the context of truly applying this passage has to do with the great cloud of witnesses that Hebrews 11 describes. It is not so much about them cheering us on to the finish line from bleachers in the clouds as it is understanding what they had to endure. If we understand what they endured, we can be encouraged that they endured and then motivated to endure ourselves. Hebrews 11 speaks of prophets getting sawn in half, whipped, tortured, stoned, ill-treated, and wandering around from cave to various holes in the ground having nothing to wear but animal skins. These people were hated, despised, and scorned by the world (Hebrews 11:36-38). Even the lives of Moses, Abraham, and other more well-known figures in the Old Testament had their episodes of epic struggle. The faithful men and women of old had a duty to tell others about obeying the commandments of God, but they were typically rejected. This brings us back to Hebrews 12:3 as we are told to remember Christ who was also despised of men and rejected. When we consider Him, it says, we will be able to not grow weary and to not lose heart. Thus, the idea is that we must remember that being in the faith "hall of fame" in Hebrews 11 is not about prestige or popularity on earth but rather about being out of place on earth, that is, being citizens of heaven. **It is about saying what almost nobody wants to hear said and doing what hardly anybody does and paying the consequences of ridicule and hardship for doing so.**

Enduring means persevering in truth and in love despite what happens, and we can expect persecution as soon as we desire to live godly in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:12). That is promised, but so is our ability to endure if we look to the joy set before us as Christ did. We must keep our eyes fixed on the prize (Philippians 3:14) just as Moses did “considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” Why? “For he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

James 5:10-12 says, “As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” We need an eternal perspective such that we can actually say and believe that those who were persecuted violently were actually blessed because they had the privilege to suffer with Christ. This is a hard truth to swallow, but it is Biblical. All of us will suffer persecution in some way to some extent, and we need to accept it and evaluate it in light of eternity in which we will consider it a blessing. In addition to persecution for our faith, we should also expect to endure trials as Job did. Job’s experience should encourage us not because the process was fun but because, in the end, God poured out His mercy and compassion on Job. Because of God’s compassion and mercy and faithfulness to reward, bless, and honor those who love Him, Christians have a great motivation to continue to endure (Matthew 5:10-12, Colossians 3:24). **The truth is that following God no matter the cost is worth a hundred times the value of not doing so plus the benefit of eternal life** (Mark 10:29-31). That is such a mind-bending reality, but it is the truth of the treasure of knowing and loving God and being known and loved by Him (Matthew 13:44).

Hebrews 10:32-36 says,

“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”

These members of the early church joyfully let people take their things even though it was wrong, evil, and unjust. Even though they were publicly humiliated despite the fact that they were innocent, they refused to become angry or bitter at God and still found it in their hearts to show sympathy and compassion toward others who were also suffering. They could do this because they knew that their treasure was in heaven where it would endure and where it was much bigger and better. They needed to keep this confidence in their eternal inheritance forefront in their minds because it would help them endure and store up further rewards in the process. We must keep doing the will of God, keep loving others, and keep preaching the gospel no matter what happens. This is endurance, and it is thriving despite barely surviving. It is the abundant life regardless of the level of material possessions. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6, speaking of his endurance of a great many tribulations, “as sorrowful yet always

rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things" (v. 10). He had nothing yet he was rich because of all the treasures he had stored up in heaven and because of the power of the gospel that he had the privilege of spreading to others.

Good health can help us endure physically, but ultimately it is the joy of the Lord that is our strength spiritually (Nehemiah 8:10). Our outer person dies a little more each day, but inwardly we can stay strong day after day. Romans 15:5 says, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." Encouragement and the ability to endure is from God, and Christ in us will enable us to walk obediently and faithfully to fulfill our work on earth if we remember that Christ also suffered, the disciples also suffered, the apostles also suffered, the prophets also suffered, and the early church also suffered. **It is normative to experience trials and tribulations, but it is abnormal to endure.** *The topic of endurance Biblically is not meant to well up within our hearts feelings of trying to pull up our own bootstraps or to get off the mat in our own strength one more time. Rather, it is something God gives to His own by grace through faith as we believe His promises and take encouragement and strength from Christ's example.*

So let us be thankful to Christ, hopeful in Christ, rested in Christ, near to Christ, with vision set upon Christ, and enduring after Christ's example and by His power and strength. To thrive is to live life fully alive inside such that it expresses itself outwardly and allows the hope of heaven to motivate us to great sacrifice, service, and surrender. Despite what the world might say, this is the essence of the abundant life. It may be a hard sell, but it is the best buy of all time.

What is T.H.R.I.V.E.? God has promised His children the abundant life (John 10:10), even when life is full of trials (John 16:33). Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, sometimes life feels like surviving more than thriving. Yet, even there, God provided for them bread from heaven and water from a rock. More importantly, He helped them learn that man does not live on bread alone but upon His Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is feasting upon the inviolable truths of Scripture that can enable us to endure. Even in times of earthly abundance, we will starve without the food of doing God's will (John 4:34). 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." This six part series will feed our souls so that we do not lose heart by strengthening the inner man despite what may be happening to us on the outside. To thrive is to live life fully alive.