

Enduring to the End *or* Just Getting Close?

James Farnsworth—June 3, 2023

Water gets faster, as it circles the drain, in like manner, as we look around at this world today, it's spinning out of control in every direction that you look:

- inflation
- border control issues
- high food prices
- high gas prices
- murder
- evil

Everywhere you look, and the list goes on and on.

We have baby drop-offs at the fire stations, if you decided that you don't want your baby anymore. Drop your baby off and no questions asked.

This world is spinning out of control in ways that we would not have ever believed would be happening today. Yet, they are happening and as God's people the really tough and difficult times are yet to come like we've never seen before. We, as well, will be going through some of these difficult times. Today I ask the question: **Will we be able to endure the difficult times ahead?**

I want to look at God's Word today and see what we can understand about endurance. Is endurance important in our lives on our Christian journey? *Enduring to the end or just getting close!*

We've heard the old saying, 'Close only counts in horseshoes.' That's is a true saying, but with God close is not an option. Just getting close will not get you and me into the Kingdom of God.

Let see some things that Christ tells us that we will have to endure. Jesus explained that time this way:

Matthew 24:21: "For then shall there be Great Tribulation, such as has not been from *the* beginning of *the* world until this time, nor ever shall be *again*."

This indicates that there's a terrible time in our future. Jesus actually told us some of the things that we must endure earlier in the prophecy:

Verse 3: "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him alone, saying, 'Tell us, when shall these things be? And what *shall be* the sign of Your coming, and of the completion of the age?' Then Jesus answered *and* said to them, 'Be on guard, so that no one deceives you. For many shall come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ"; and they shall deceive many'" (vs 3-

5).

First, Christ warns us about 'religious' deception! We are given the warning to avoid being deceived by those who profess Christ's name but teach doctrines that are contrary to what He taught.

Tie in Rev. 6:2. We're told that this ***religious deception*** in the end time will be ***led by a false prophet*** who has great political power and becomes a conqueror who tries to influence the world with his false teachings.

We're given our warning here; Christians must endure these times ahead. Christians must work hard to not fall victim to this religious power's deception. Jesus warned us to take heed that no one deceive us. So, how do we avoid deception?

2-Thessalonians 2:10: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the Truth, so that they might be saved."

We avoid this 'religious' deception by developing a deep knowledge and love of God's Truth! Christ said that 'If you love Me, keep My commandments.'

- Are we doing that?
- Are we seeking the Truth with prayer and Bible study?
- Are we living by every word of God?

or

- Are we just getting close?

Keeping God's commandments is a sure way of loving God's Truth and drawing close to Him!

Matthew 24:6: "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See *that* you do not let *these things* disturb you. For it is necessary *that all these things* take place, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in *different* places" (vs 6-7).

So, the next time that Christ warns of His wars and rumors of wars, warfare will be a constant and prevalent factor in mankind's future, which will end the lives of millions. We see that in Rev. 6:4. These wars will range from conflicts against other nations to civil wars as countries tear themselves apart.

Then because of the wars, there will be famines and pestilences. Famines will strike the earth causing food to be scarce and prices to skyrocket to an extent never before seen.

We are beginning to see some of these things happening slowly today. Amid malnutrition, warfare and disease will run rampant. Epidemics and pandemics will spread across the globe. Earthquakes will also strike, and as always, mankind will be totally helpless, only able to cleanup the wreckage in the aftermath. *Sounds bad! But Christ declared:*

Verse 8: “Now, all these *things are* the beginning of sorrows.”

With religious deception, warfare, famine, pestilence and natural disasters striking all over the world, people will turn against God, and the people of God. In their anger and confusion, mankind will lash out against anyone trying to live God’s way. Neighbors and family will betray one another. And in this era of lawlessness, people will lose love for one another.

We see this happening more today! Knowing that his time is almost up, Satan will attack God’s people with everything that he has.

Revelation 12:12: “...For the Devil has come down to you, having great wrath *because* he knows that he has *only* a short time.”

Some of God’s people will be killed for following God. We see that in:

Revelation 6:9: “And when He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony that they held; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, Holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (vs 9-10).

We see here that this time will be very difficult. We will, brethren, be able to endure to the end no matter how difficult it is? Is it worth it? *A question that we must ask is whether or not this way of life is worth it!*

Christ tells us that we are to count the cost and gauge whether we value His way of life far more than the trials that will come.

Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers and sisters, and, in addition, his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple; for which one of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has *sufficient* for its completion; lest perhaps, after he has laid its foundation and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build, and was not able to finish?’: (vs 26-30).

Verse 31: “Or what king, when he goes out to engage another king in war, does not first sit

down *and* take counsel, whether he will be able with ten thousand to meet him who is coming against him with twenty thousand?”

Verse 32: “But if not, while his *enemy* is still far off, he sends ambassadors and desires the *terms* for peace. In the same way also, each one of you who does not forsake all that he possesses cannot be My disciple” (vs 32-33).

Christ tells us here what we must do to be one of His disciples. So, how much we love and value God’s Truth will determine whether or not we stay faithful and endure to the very end.

What is endurance? *The power of going on in spite of difficulties! Getting through the trial without compromising or wavering! We don’t cut corners! We don’t take the wide path, we stay on the narrow path and keep moving forward!*

Endurance means *rightly handling God’s Word, which is our wisdom and being ready for every good work!* As we’ve heard recently, it’s not the world’s wisdom; *it’s God’s wisdom that we look forward to having in our lives! Moving us forward!*

Satan is the ‘god of this world.’ Satan loves discouragement! Discouragement is strong, and is one of Satan’s favorite ways to bring God’s people down. If the enemy can convince us that something is impossible, then he wins! If we’ve tried something a hundred times and it fails, try a hundred and one! *Giving up entirely is the only way to fail!*

Paul expressed that endurance is important in character development. It helps us to develop our character, and that’s what God is looking for.

Romans 5:3: “And not only *this*, but we also boast in tribulations, realizing that **tribulation brings forth endurance**, and endurance *brings forth* character, and character *brings forth* hope. And the hope of God never makes us ashamed because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us” (vs 3-5).

We’ve been given God’s Spirit to help us, but remember that God is in charge of our lives. His desire is for us to grow in the likeness of His Son.

So, whatever enters our lives, unfavorable circumstances, tragic events or even irritating people, it’s all to develop our character. Be good, bad or indifferent, our response to life’s irritants forms our character.

The oyster and its pearl provide a beautiful picture of a positive response to life’s irritants. The pearl is a product of pain, an alien substance, a grain of sand slips inside the oyster shell. On the entry of that foreign irritant all the resources within the tiny sensitive oyster rushes to the spot and begins to

release the healing fluids that otherwise would have remained dormant.

Eventually, the irritant is covered and the wound heals by a pearl. No other gem has a so fascinating history. It is a symbol of stress. The precious tiny jewel is conceived through irritation born of adversity. Had there been no wounding, no irritating interruption there could have been no pearl.

Remember, *God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called*, and He'll always be there to love and guide each one of us to great things.

So, the story of the pearl tells us that no great thing is achieved without suffering and, after suffering, comes new life.

We all know that there are trials and difficulties in this life, and we will have to endure. The things that we have to endure cannot be compared to what God has in store for us. *We can never forget that!*

James 1:2: "Consider *it* all joy, my brethren, when you are beset by various trials."

Why do we rejoice when we go through difficult things in our life? *Because of James 1:3:*

Verse 3: "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But let endurance have *its* perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, not lacking in anything" (vs 3-4).

This trial that we go through is a testing process that God is allowing us to go through. 'Now I know' just as God tested Abraham! We all have to put forth an effort. It's not easy sometimes going through the difficult things that we go through. But we can be encouraged:

Colossians 3:23: "And whatever you do, do heartily, as to the Lord and not to men"—*work at it with all your heart!*

This verse is a beautiful reminder of why we are working toward our goals. We will always be disappointed if we're only working to win other people's attention, adoration and approval! Putting our heart into our work makes it personal, makes it much more fulfilling. It's not just checks on our 'to do' list. It's about growing closer to God as we serve Him in all that we do, and we put our heart in it!

You can read story after story in the Bible, examples of people who faced impossible, difficult situations. Yet, they still made their choice to keep moving forward in faith without knowing what the outcome would be.

Read Job and some of the difficult situations that he went through. Paul was imprisoned over and over again, being shipwrecked, yet, he still chose to

praise God and continue His work. There are so many more that we can read about and learn from:

- David
- Jacob
- Abraham
- Jeremiah
- Ruth
- and many more

Jesus Christ Himself is the ultimate display of perseverance into death. He was born and lives a sinless life. He taught us how to live by His example. He persevered and gave His life for all mankind, and offered the most perfect example of endurance as He finished the race of life perfectly.

Sometimes when we feel like quitting, inspiration can be found by the examples of the people mentioned in the Bible. They endured in faith, clinging to hope every step of the way, and we can do the same, brethren. Sometimes we do need encouragement.

Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, *since* we are surrounded by such a great throng of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entraps us; *and* let us run the race set before us with endurance."

Endurance is what it takes! We must endure this same race! Understand that this race is a marathon! It's not a hundred-yard dash that we finish. This race requires daily discipline and perseverance.

One of the first questions I ask myself when I feel like I can't do anymore, when I feel like I can't run anymore: What is the biggest thing standing in my way? That simple question usually uncovers and answer that I can work with. I make a decision to change when I find out what is holding me back. Sometimes just asking that question alone is a powerful thing. It gets our mind to thinking about what's making us want to give up. We have to keep our eyes on the lookout for sin that might have crept in. The enemy is a master at using sin to discourage, disappoint and destroy us. That's what Satan is trying to do.

We all know that Satan is the 'god of this world,' and he wants to stop God's Plan. Where does Satan attack God's people. We can be encouraged:

Philippians 4:13: "**I can do all things through Christ Who empowers me.**"

We have a Helper to help us get through whatever comes before us. When we face difficult things in our life, we always have a choice. God wants to see who we make that choice.

Sure, we have the option of giving up, *or we can chose to grow!* When we choose to keep going through the tough stuff, our character changes. We become stronger and more steadfast. We become more confident and full of hope. So, endurance doesn't just change the end result that we're working toward, it changes who we are in the best kinds of ways.

Never forget that we always have Someone to turn to. We have Someone who will be fighting for us. We're not alone doing this, but sometimes we do get the feeling that we are alone.

Deuteronomy 31:8: "And the LORD *is* He Who goes before you. He will be with you; **He will not fail you nor forsake you. Do not fear; nor be dismayed.**"

One of the lies that we often believe when we feel stuck in whatever we're in:

- nobody else understands how hard it is
- nobody else has been through this situation
- nobody else feels my pain
- no one gets it

Have we felt that way before? *God promises that He will never leave you or forsake you!* Just because we're going through a tough time doesn't mean that He's abandoned us. God is there with us, helping us through.

2-Corinthians 4:16: "**For this reason, we do not lose heart;** but if our outward man is being brought to decay, yet, **the inward man is being renewed day-by-day.**"

All of the outward things we've worked so hard to achieve, maybe:

- weight loss goals
- a better paying job
- a bigger house

These are all temporary! The things we see are just a tiny fraction of the big picture that God sees. ***Are we becoming more:***

- patient?
- loving?
- joyful?
- peaceful?

If we can say *yes* then we are on the right track! Those are fruits of the Spirit that show us that we are becoming more like Christ. It tells us that we are enduring and that we are growing.

Perseverance changes our character. It's not just about crossing the finish line, it's about who we are when we do. Some people think that they have to do everything perfect. We are in the process of

becoming perfect.

Psalm 37:24: "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the LORD upholds him with His hand."

It's okay to 'mess up' along the way! We do fall short. Endurance isn't about knowing with certainty that each step you take is the right one now. We have to continually lean on God for help, because we can't do these things of and by ourselves. I want to read Co. 1:9-11 in this way:

We continually ask God to fill us with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that His Spirit gives, so that we may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way. Bearing fruit in every good work! Growing in the knowledge of God! Being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, so that we many have great endurance and patience.

Colossians 1:9: "For this cause we also, from the day that we heard *of it*, do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthily of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy" (vs 9-11).

Is endurance important in our Christian journey?

Hebrews 10:36: "**For you need to have endurance, so that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.**"

We have to endure to finish the race, which is God's will for us. Then we will receive the promise that He has for us.

- What is that goal?
- What is that promise?

James 1:12: "Blessed *is the* man who endures trials, **because after he has been proved he shall receive a crown of life,** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

We keep His commandments because we love Him. Then we will reign with God and Christ forever. Those that love Him are obeying God in all that they do, with all their heart, mind and soul. These are the ones who endures to the end. These are the ones who have finished the race.

Endurance is a very important part of our spiritual growth. Not only does it help us to develop patience, but also understanding what God requires

of our actions to also reflect His words completely in our life no matter what the trial is.

Throughout our lives going through trials and tests is one of the key factors that will help us to draw closer to God. I hope and pray that we can all say the words of Paul:

2-Timothy 4:7: “**I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.**”

Paul said that he had fought a good fight, but it wasn't easy, and we have to fight that fight, as well. This means staying close to God in prayer, Bible study, meditating and seeking God's Word.

If we can say the same words as the Apostle Paul, we will meet at the finish line: God's glorious Kingdom that is soon to come and will last forever!

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 24:21, 3-5
- 2) 2 Thessalonians 2:10
- 3) Matthew 24:6-8
- 4) Revelation 12:12
- 5) Revelation 6:9-10
- 6) Luke 14:26-33
- 7) Romans 5:3-5
- 8) James 1:2-4
- 9) Colossians 3:23
- 10) Hebrews 12:1
- 11) Philippians 4:13
- 12) Deuteronomy 31:8
- 13) 2 Corinthians 4:16
- 14) Psalm 37:24
- 15) Colossians 1:9-11
- 16) Hebrews 10:26
- 17) James 1:12
- 18) 2 Timothy 4:7

Scripture referenced, not quoted: Revelation 6:2, 4

JF:bo
Transcribed: 6/7/23

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