

Preparing for the Race



Endurance (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you precious truths out of Scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life—and can do the same in yours.

In my introductory talk yesterday I pointed out that there are some people who sincerely want to be strong, successful Christians—and yet they never really make it. The reason is not that God has failed to make the necessary provision for them to succeed. Rather, it is that they are not availing themselves of all that God has provided for them.

I suggested that building a strong, successful Christian character is like baking a cake. Various ingredients are needed. If one of the essential ingredients is missing, you can go through all the procedures of baking—but the cake will not turn out right.

The particular ingredient of a successful Christian character that we're looking at this week is endurance or perseverance, both words are used. I pointed out that there is a specific process by which this element of endurance or perseverance is produced. For instance, we looked yesterday at Romans 5, verses 3 and 4.

> "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope." (NIV)

So, there's a process. When we go through suffering and hold out and don't give in, that produces endurance or perseverance. Endurance or perseverance, in turn, produces real Christian character. And out of real Christian character, there comes hope, a kind of serene confidence with which we're able to face anything that comes against us in life. We also looked at the words of James in his epistle, chapter 1, verses 2 through 4. I'll just recapitulate briefly before we move into the new material for today. James says:

> "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [I never read those words without asking myself, "Is that my reaction to trials?" Let me ask you, "Is that your reaction to trials?" When you face

> trials of many kinds, do you consider it pure joy? I wonder if you can give an honest answer to that and feel satisfied. Let's read it again.] Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [Why?] Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance [or endurance]. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything." (NIV)

See those words, they're very strong and significant. Perseverance must finish its work. You cannot become the kind of Christian that you want to be and that God wants you to be without perseverance. That's essential in the total process to make you mature and complete and not lacking anything.

Today I'm going to share with you further insights on this theme of endurance. These will be taken mainly from the epistle to the Hebrews. First of all, we'll look in Hebrews, chapter 6, verses 10 through 12.

> "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (NIV)

Let's look at what the writer is saying there. First of all, he's writing to people who had a good past record. They'd been faithful in their service in the past and he says, "God isn't going to forget that; He remembers it, but your past faithfulness, by itself, is not enough." He urges them that they need diligence to continue, "Don't change; don't give up; don't drop out of the race; don't fade away." He warns them against laziness, "We do not want you to become lazy." I think not nearly enough is said in most churches against laziness. Laziness is a deadly sin. We speak against drunkenness and things like that, and adultery and fornication, and we have every right to do so, we must, but in many ways, laziness is just as deadly a sin as any of those, and yet so many Christians get away with being lazy. They're never even rebuked; they're never challenged. "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Notice, in order to inherit God's promise, in order to enter into all that God has provided for you, you need not only faith; you need patience. You've got to hold out. You've believed, you've done everything that God said, but you haven't yet seen the result. Nothing has gone wrong. The next ingredient has to be mixed in. After faith, comes patience—holding out.

Let's go on to Hebrews 10, 35 through 39—some very solemn words:

> "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere [The reward comes to those who persevere; that's the implication. Let me say those words again.] You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised. [Notice, there's a gap of time between doing the will of God and receiving the promise. We do the will of God, we say, 'God you've promised this and this', we don't necessarily, immediately see what God has promised. Between doing the will of God and receiving the promise, comes perseverance. If we don't persevere, we can forfeit the promise that we've been claiming. The writer goes on:] For in just a little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe [or go on believing] and are saved." (NIV)

I see four main warnings or lessons in that passage. First, do not throw away your confidence. You've had a strong faith, you've been a strong, committed believer. Be careful that you don't give up the good thing that you have. Then, as I've pointed out, but let me say it again, perseverance is needed to obtain the promises of God. It's one thing to fulfill the conditions; it's another thing to receive the promise. Almost all of us know from experience, there's often a considerable interval of time between our doing the thing that entitles us to the promise and our receiving the fulfillment of the promise. In that interval, we have to practice perseverance. Then thirdly, remember the reward is ahead. The final reward is not right now. It is when He who is coming, will come. That's when the final reward comes. We have to have perseverance until that. And then, and this is very solemn, this passage that I read there in Hebrews, chapter 10, really leaves us only two alternatives. We either persevere, or we shrink back. If we persevere, we'll inherit the promise. But if we shrink back, we'll be destroyed. That's strong language. But I'm grateful to the honesty of the Word of God that confronts us so frankly without alternatives. Let me ask you as you listen, which are you going to do? Are you going to persevere? Or are you going to shrink back?

My prayer for each one who hears me is that you will persevere. That's my intention. That's my aim, to persevere, to receive the promise.

Let's look at the third picture in Hebrews about this same need of perseverance or endurance. Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2:

> "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. [Let me emphasize those words, "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter [or finisher] of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (NIV)

That's a very vivid passage. It compares the Christian life to a race that's run with a great many spectators. There's a grandstand that watches us as we're running the race and the grandstand is filled with all the saints that have gone before, who've finished their race, who kept the faith, and they're there in the invisible world watching us and almost cheering us on and doing everything they can to encourage us so that we will not give up, that we'll persevere, that we'll finish the course. Think of those witnesses in the grandstand. It may be there are those in your family or your immediate circle of friends who've passed on, who finished their course and kept the faith. Think of them there in the grandstand just waiting to see you do the same.

And then it says we've got to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us. Some things are not sin but they hinder. When an athlete is got to run a race, he doesn't fill his pockets with all sorts of unnecessary things. He strips down to the barest minimum of everything that he has to wear. Otherwise he has no hope of winning the race. There are a lot of things in our lives which are not sinful but they're not necessary and if we're going to run the race, we're going to have to not merely get rid of sin, but get rid of other things that hinder us from running the race. And then bear in mind, the Christian life is not a hundred yard dash; it's a marathon. It's not a question of how fast you can run; the question is, can you endure, can you hold out. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

And then there's a final word of counsel. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He's the pattern. He's the example. He's the one who endured. He went through the cross. He went through the opposition. He went through all that came against Him but He endured because he saw what lay ahead for the joy set before Him. And bear in mind, He's the author and the perfecter of our faith. Not merely did He begin the job, but He'll finish the job if we keep our eyes on Him and follow Him with endurance.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking on *the two kinds of tests that we have to face*.

Radio Program

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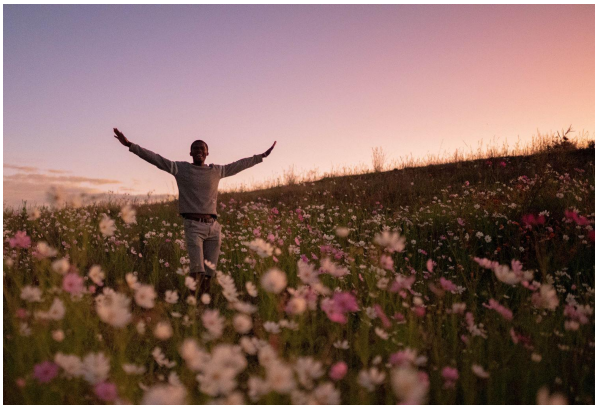

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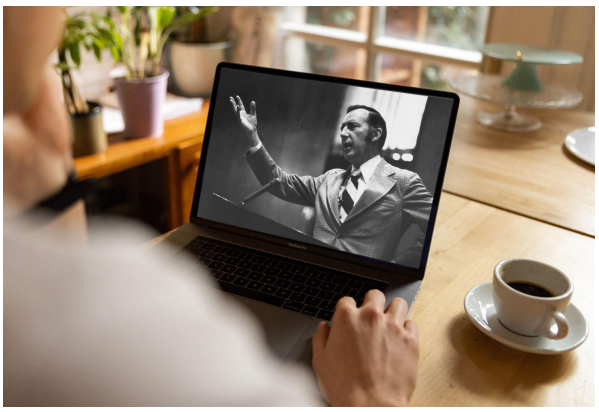

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