

Two Kinds of Tests



Endurance (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you on this week's vitally important theme: Endurance.

In my two previous talks on endurance this week I've explained certain basic things. First, endurance is an essential element of a successful Christian character. Without endurance we cannot achieve success in our Christian lives. Second, it takes tests and trials to build endurance. Therefore when we are confronted with tests, the Scripture says we should come to pure joy, seeing in it the hand of God permitting us to go through these tests that He may cultivate in us endurance which is essential for our success as Christians.

And then, looking at a picture in the Epistle of the Hebrews yesterday, we saw that the Christian life is a marathon, not a hundred yard dash and that we have to run our race with endurance. That's the essential requirement for completing the course.

Today I'm going to speak specifically about the kinds of tests that we must expect to face in the Christian life, the kinds of tests that are needed to cultivate endurance in us. The tests we meet as Christians will take many different forms and come in many different ways. But essentially they fall into two main categories—each the opposite of the other, and it's these two categories we're going to look at today. The first category is when things are too hard. The second category is when things are too easy.

Now, most people could understand that the first is a problem when things are too hard. But I think the Scripture reveals an experience confirmed that a lot of people who stand when things are pretty hard, cannot succeed when things become too easy. I'm going to illustrate these two opposite kinds of tests from one of the most familiar parables of Jesus, the parable of the sower. This is found in Luke, chapter 8, verses 4 through 8. I'll read the parable then a little further on we come to Jesus' own interpretation of this parable. First of all the parable:

> "While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was

> scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. [And one of the other versions emphasizes the roots were not able to go down deep enough.] Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.'" (NIV)

Now a little further on in the same chapter, verses 11 through 15, Jesus Himself gives us the interpretation of this parable:

> "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so they cannot believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." (NIV)

I'm sure you noticed the word, "persevering." We'll come to that a little later. Now this parable depicts four kinds of people—different response to hearing the Word of God. The first kind, that's the seed that fell on the pathway, are those unto whom the Word the word never enters and we're not going to be concerned with them. The second kind, those that were in rocky soil, represents those who receive but can not endure testing. The third kind, those who fell among thorns represent those who are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. And the fourth kind is a kind we all want to be—those who produce a crop by persevering.

Well, as I've said, we're not going to spend time on the first group because the seed never entered—nothing ever happened. The birds of the air came and caught it away before it ever gained entrance.

We're going to focus for a time on the second and the third groups. The second group were those who received but could not endure testing—the ones who were in the rocky soil. The third group were those among the thorns where the plants grew up but they were choked by the thorns which were life's worries, riches, and pleasures. Now, concerning those on the rocky soil who could not endure testing, in a parallel passage in Matthew, chapter 13, verse 21, as Jesus interprets the parable there, He says, "When trouble or persecution comes, they cannot endure." There's one word I want to emphasize there. It's "when," "when trouble or persecution comes." Jesus did not say, "If" trouble or persecution comes, but "when." In other words, we are going to have to face trouble and persecution in some form or another. Now the problem with these people was that the seed or the roots from the seed could not go down to any real depth because the rocks stopped them. And so, when the hot son rose and beat upon those plants, although they'd grown up very quickly, they withered and died because their roots didn't go down deep enough.

Now I have to say with deep sorrow, over many years in Christian ministry, I've seen many people like that. I've seen people have a marvelous experience of conversion, get all excited about it and you think, wonderful, but I've come to ask myself, are they growing too fast? Are they growing up so high, so quickly, because they haven't gone down deep enough? They're the kind of people who give superficial adherence but there's really no depth in their commitment. And when the testing comes, they just wither. A few years later you wonder where they ever were. They just dropped out of the picture.

Let's look now at the third kind—those who fell among thorns. As their problem was that things were too easy. Notice the problem—life's worries, riches, and pleasures. Now riches and pleasures suggest a life at least of comparative ease. There's not a lot of persecution. There's not a lot of opposition. There's not a lot of pressure—pressure—things are going too well.

I want you to compare the words of Jesus in Luke 17 where He speaks about what it will be like at the end of this age and He compares the time of Noah and the time of Lot and this is what He says.

> "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the Son of Man. [That's the close of this age.] People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all." (NIV)

What was the problem with these people who didn't make it through? They were too occupied with temporal things and I want to list the things that Jesus mentions: eating, drinking, marrying, being given in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building. Now what I want to point out is, none of those things are sinful. The sin is not doing those things; the sin is becoming engrossed in those things so that we lose sight of eternal values and our priorities are all out of line and we give more thought, more attention to the things of time than we do to the things of eternity.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 21:34. This is a warning against this type of problem.

> "Be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap." (NIV)

Don't get entangled with the things of time. When things are going easy, when you have riches, when you have pleasures, just bear in mind, that's not the ultimate. There's something much more important. Don't lose sight of the eternal. Don't let those things choke the life of the seed of the Word of God which is growing up in you.

Finally, let's look for just a moment at the fourth group—those who actually produced a crop. Let's look at what Jesus said about them again in Luke 8:15:

> "But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." (NIV)

Notice, there's no way to produce a crop without persevering. Persevering is essential. You can receive the seed, it can begin to grow in your life, all sorts of exciting things can happen, you can have a very wonderful encounter with the Lord, a wonderful conversion, a wonderful new birth, but unless you persevere, the end will not be what God intends.

These people had a noble and a good heart. Well that's something that we need to be grateful for. But notice, the nobility and the goodness of their heart had to be cultivated by perseverance.

You know, as I've lived the Christian life and ministered to people, I've seen a lot of people who didn't seem to have very much who made it through, and a lot of people who seem to have a lot of talent and ability who never made it through. What was the difference? The difference is perseverance. Without perseverance, no matter how many talents you may have, you will never make it through, you'll never produce a crop.

Well our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking on *steps to achieve endurance.*

Radio Program

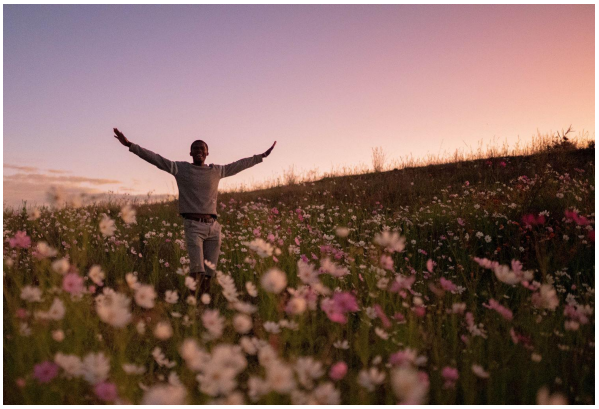
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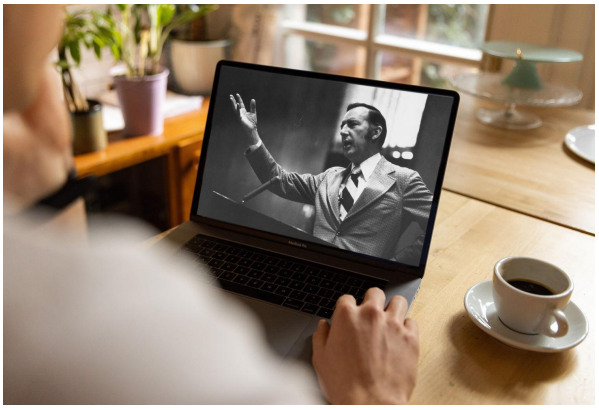
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