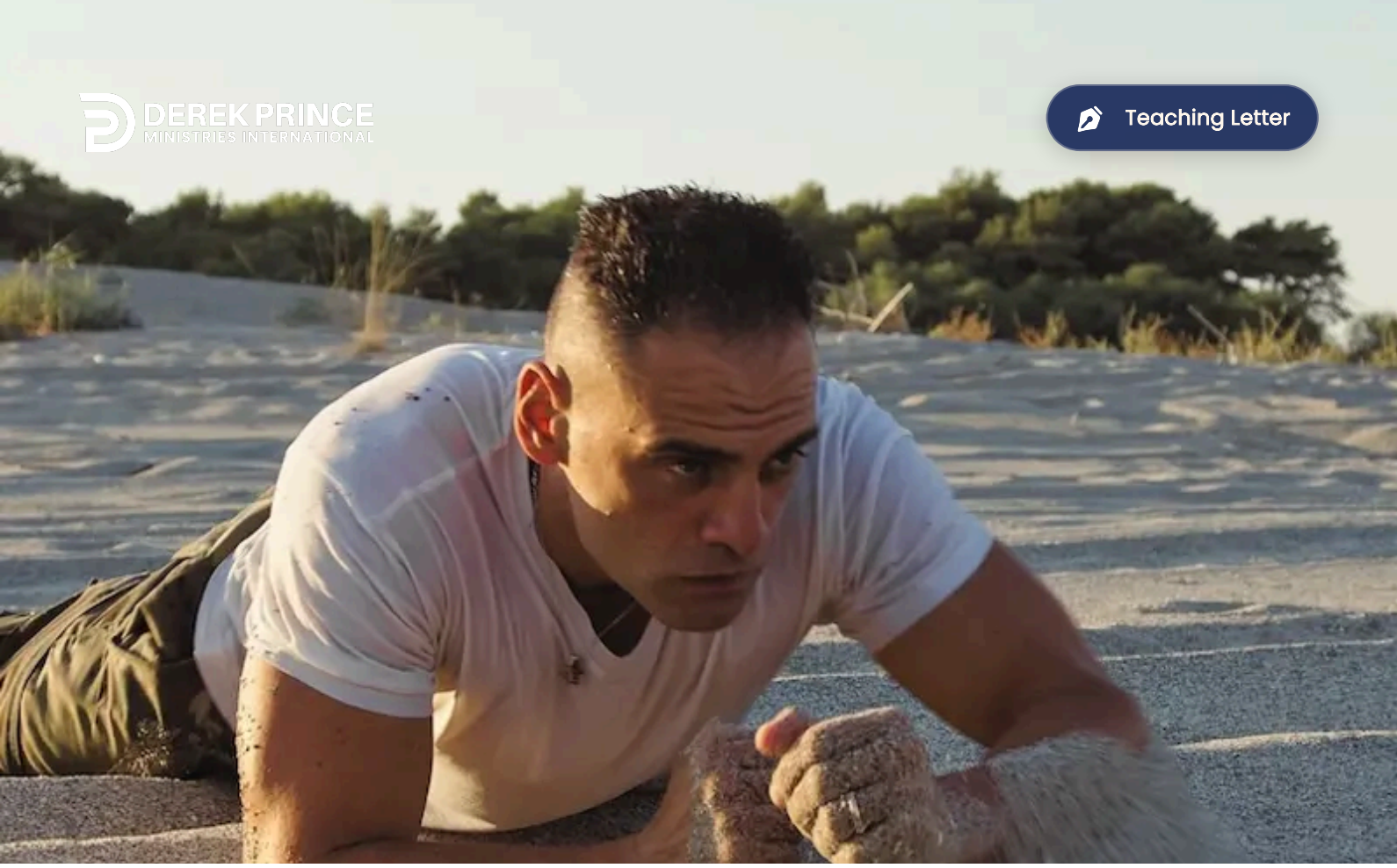


Endurance Through Focus



Part 3/6

Standing Strong
By Derek Prince

In the first letter in this series, *Character that Stands the Test*, we began to explore the nature of endurance. We saw from both Paul (in Romans) and James that endurance through testing builds character. If you will hold on through the test, it will surely shape every area of your character and personality. It will make you a complete, fully-rounded Christian. There will be very few—if any—areas in your character that do not get addressed.

I also pointed out that the most character-shaping tests come in the context of close, committed fellowship. When you aren't too close to people or too intimate, you can cover up the cracks in your character. But when you are exposed to regular, intimate, vulnerable, close fellowship, you're forced either to back out or face up to what God wants to bring you through. I believe there is no greater test of our Christian character than close fellowship.

In this letter let's begin with a Scripture about endurance as it relates to ministry:

> Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. (2 Corinthians 12:12)

Paul says the first evidence of an apostolic ministry is not miracles but perseverance. The true apostle is the one who hangs on when everybody else gives up. Paul's support group was dwindling when he wrote his second epistle to Timothy. This was the last epistle Paul wrote, probably just shortly before his execution by a Roman executioner.

> Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. (2 Timothy 4:9–11)

Right at the end his coworkers left him in prison. What did they lack? Endurance. What marked the apostle? Endurance. That comes before the miracles. Some people have miracles but no endurance.

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Not “If” but “When”

What are the kinds of tests that we will have to go through? In Matthew 13 Jesus tells the well-known parable of the sower who went forth with the seed. He speaks about the different kinds of soil, each representative of a different kind of person who hears the Word of God. Some of the seed fell by the wayside and never entered into the ground—it was caught up by the birds. Some fell on rocky ground. Some fell amongst thorns. Then He goes on to describe the type of person represented by each kind of soil. There is nothing profound in this; it is very simple:

> 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. 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. (Matthew 13:19–21)

Notice one little word there: when. Jesus didn’t say if persecution or tribulation arises—He said when tribulation or persecution arises. They will arise.

> 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 13:22)

Very simply stated, there are two kinds of tests: when it is too hard, and when it is too easy—the first is persecution; the second is riches. Some people can’t stand the persecution. Some people can’t stand the prosperity. We need to be able to stand both tests.

Some people can make it when they are persecuted, but when God blesses them—the beautiful home, two cars, maybe 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. They’re tremendous. They pop up the first night after they get saved, give their testimony, then they get baptized in the Holy Spirit, speak in tongues and prophesy. As the saying goes, they’re like a house on fire. But three months later, you just don’t know where they are. Because the moment opposition and trouble came, they just wilted away. They had no root. I am almost scared when a new Christian starts too quickly. I would rather see somebody have a little struggle at the beginning.

When I worked as a pastor in London, to get one person baptized in the Holy Spirit was a victory. And I observed that for every ten persons who were baptized in the Spirit, one would stand and the rest would fall away. The opposition was so intense in those days. The people who had to struggle and fight were the ones you could rely on. The ones who had to struggle every inch of the way stood the test and stand today. So bear in mind, you are going to be tested by tribulation, and you are going to be tested by success. You have to hold out through both.

Start Strong

Here are two suggestions from the Bible on how we can achieve endurance. The first one is to make our commitment to Jesus Christ wholehearted—without any reservations. Consider the words of Barnabas to a group of new Christians in the city of Antioch in Syria.

> 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. (Acts 11:23)

“Purpose of heart” is the key phrase. You make your mind up that you are going to stick with the Lord regardless—no matter who does or who doesn’t. If your friends don’t, you will. If your family doesn’t, you will. That is purpose of heart. You are going to continue with God.

In Acts 14:22 we again find Barnabas and Paul exhorting new converts in another Antioch, Antioch in Pisidia, another city of the same name.

> ... 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.”

It's hard to find another way into the kingdom of God other than through tribulation. Keep in mind that the Word presents the kingdom of God in two senses: the kingdom future (which Jesus will bring and establish) and the kingdom that we enter into now. We live now in the kingdom—but it is through much tribulation that you come into kingdom living. You likely will be subjected to pressure in every area of your life. And you might say, "Why does it happen to me?" The answer is because God is preparing you for the kingdom.

Sometimes I think we owe it to people when they come to the Lord to warn them that if they are going to move into the kingdom, it will be through tribulation and opposition. I think it is unfair to tell new converts that when they come to Jesus, all their problems will be solved, because it certainly rarely, if ever, will work out that way. In fact, often you will have problems you never knew existed before.

The second principle of enduring comes from one of my favorite passages of Scripture: Hebrews 11:27. Moses grew up in Egypt and was destined to inherit the throne as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He had everything that the world could offer—education, wealth, social privilege. 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. What a test of character!

> By faith [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:27)

In this one short verse we discover the essence of endurance: seeing Him who is invisible. How do you see that which is invisible? What faculty enables you to see it? The answer is faith. Faith is related to the unseen. Faith is a sure conviction concerning things not seen. If you and I are going to hold out, the unseen world has got to be more real to us than the seen.

My next letter will conclude our study of endurance. Until then, let's close this study with a look at 2 Corinthians.

> Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:17–18)

Coming back to the same theme in the last two verses of the next chapter, Paul says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment …" When you seriously consider what Paul went through, those words should make you pause before complaining about your affliction. He was beaten four times, stoned once, shipwrecked twice, left to die. He endured hunger, thirst, nakedness, peril, and he says:

> 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 [they are not truly real, they don't last; they look glamorous, seductive, tremendous, exciting, thrilling, but they are not permanent], but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)

"The mirror" in 2 Corinthians 3 is the Word of God. The Bible says that while we look in the mirror the Holy Spirit reveals to us the glory of the Lord, and we are changed into the likeness of what we see. You see the invisible in the mirror of God's Word. God's Word is a mirror that shows the invisible. The more you look in it, the more effectively the Holy Spirit can work in you revealing the glory of God and transforming you into the likeness of what you see.

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