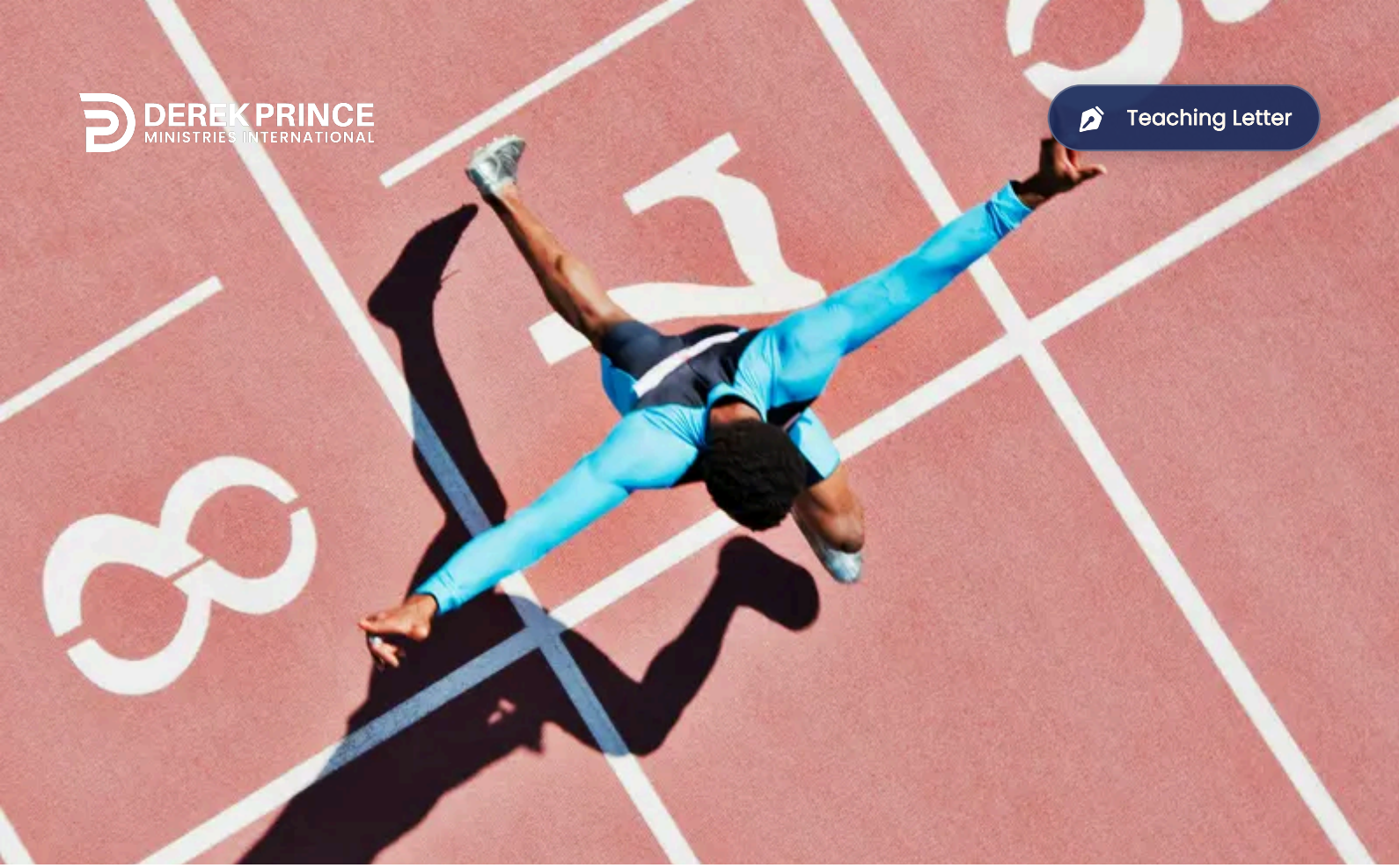


Finishing the Race



Part 4/6

Standing Strong
By Derek Prince

Webster's New World Dictionary defines endurance as "fortitude" and "the ability to last, continue, or remain." We studied this theme in our last three letters and will be concluding this part of our study with this one. There are, however, two more letters in the *Standing Strong* series in which we will look at the authority of God's Word. We are indeed learning both the cost and the blessing connected to the ability to remain: to endure.

In the last letter I offered two suggestions for cultivating endurance. The first was to make your commitment to Jesus a wholehearted one. In Acts, Barnabas spoke of "purpose of heart" (11:23). 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. When tribulation comes, you're not going to give up. That is purpose of heart.

The second principle of enduring came from Hebrews 11:27, where we saw that Moses "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Moses' faith was related to the unseen. If you and I are going to hold out, the unseen world has got to be more real to us than the seen.

Many years ago in London, the daughter of a Swedish pastor lived with us for about three months learning English, which I taught her. She was a very beautiful, talented girl with a lovely singing voice. Her father was the pastor of the largest Pentecostal church in Sweden, and she had grown up in a very strict Pentecostal environment.

When this girl was about fourteen years old, she was listening to what all her friends at school talked about—all the pleasures of the theater and dancing and things like that. And she became more and more interested. So one day she went to her father and said, "Father, I want to thank you for the care that you've given me, the way you trained me and brought me up. But I want to tell you that from now on I want to go another way. I want to find out what the world has to offer. I hear all my friends talking about it, and I want to find out for myself." And her father, who was a wise man, said, "Barbara, your mother and I will pray for you." He didn't argue. He didn't say it was wrong. He said, "We'll pray."

That night, the daughter had the most vivid dream of her life. In this dream she saw two cities, and one was a big, modern, beautiful city. It was filled with lights flashing and

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glittering everywhere. Across a valley there was another city that had a different kind of light. It didn't flash, it didn't glitter, but it was steady and calm. While she was looking at the city with the glittering neon lights, a man introduced himself to her. He was very cultivated, very educated and very well dressed. He said, "I'd like to show you around this city." And she went with him.

The further she went with him, the uglier he became. Soon she realized it was the devil himself. As she stopped there in horror, all the lights in this neon city began to go out one by one by one until the city was in total darkness. She turned to look across at the other city, and it was as bright and clear as it had always been. The next day she went to her father and said, "Daddy, I'm coming to church with you." She was a wise girl. She listened when the Lord spoke.

Often when Lydia and I were in a big, modern city and we would see all those neon lights and the traffic and the excitement, the exhilaration and the pleasure, we would turn to one another and say, "Do you remember Barbara's dream?" One night all those lights will go out. That is coming very soon. All those lights are going out.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 Paul writes:

> 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.

Those are the things that are eternal. They don't change. They are in the Word.

Stay in the Word. Don't take just five minutes a day with your Bible. Read it. Meditate on it. Believe it. Live in it. Ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to you. And that Word will become so real to you that there will be nothing in this world that could tempt you or attract you in any disloyalty to Jesus Christ. I believe in enjoying life—in exercise and in pleasure. I have been delivered from legalism—in which I spent many years—but I don't want to love the world nor the things that are in the world. Because "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). And I owe everything to my Father. I don't want to be disloyal to Him. I want to show Him my gratitude and appreciation. He has made me His child and an heir of Christ, and I want to show Him I appreciate His goodness. I want to keep my eyes on the things that are not seen.

I am a realist and live a very practical life. I believe in having things in order. I answer my letters and pay my bills. Both of my feet are on the ground, but my eyes are on the unseen. There is such a very thin veil between us and eternity. There's a very simple, old song that says, "Sometimes I grow homesick for heaven." Well, I really do. And yet, I'm not complaining about earth. God has treated me better than I could have ever hoped or deserved. But never forget that there is something beyond time.

Another old song says, "The cross before me, the world behind me. Should no one join me, still I will follow. No turning back ... For I have decided to follow Jesus." The first time I ever heard that chorus was a November night in 1947 in the city of Jerusalem. My wife and I and our eight daughters had just fled our home under cover of night and taken refuge in an American mission in the center of Jerusalem. We were without food, without a home, without anything. We had walked out in the middle of the night and left everything. When I got to that mission, they were singing that song. It was the first time I had ever heard it, "Should no one join me, still I would follow."

Don't Quit

I have two more endurance-builders to share with you. The first one is as important as it is simple: when you fail, don't give up. Others have failed before you—and I am one of them. One of the devil's most clever tricks is to convince you that you are a failure and that you might as well give up. He will try to tell you that God has given up on you. Don't believe him. He's a liar.

> The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. (Psalm 37:23–24)

Have you ever fallen? Remember that you will not be utterly cast down because the Lord still has your hand. Do you know how David knew that? Because he had fallen. Terribly. Tragically. He committed adultery and arranged for the death of the man whose wife he had stolen. And yet God forgave him and restored him. David was able to say, "Even when you fall, don't give up. God will pick you up."

There was also a man in the New Testament who fell. His name was Peter. Jesus spoke these two verses to Peter knowing that Peter was going to deny Him three times.

And the Lord said:

> Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail ... (Luke 22:31–32)

What a depth in those verses! Jesus didn't pray that Peter would not deny Him, He prayed that his faith would not fail. If Peter's faith had failed, there would have been no way back. So when you fall, stretch out your hand and let the Lord pick you up. And don't give up—because He hasn't given up on you.

Finally, remember the prize-giving. Not all the issues of life are settled in the here and now. There are some that remain for the future. Let's look at the words of Paul written from jail to Timothy:

> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)

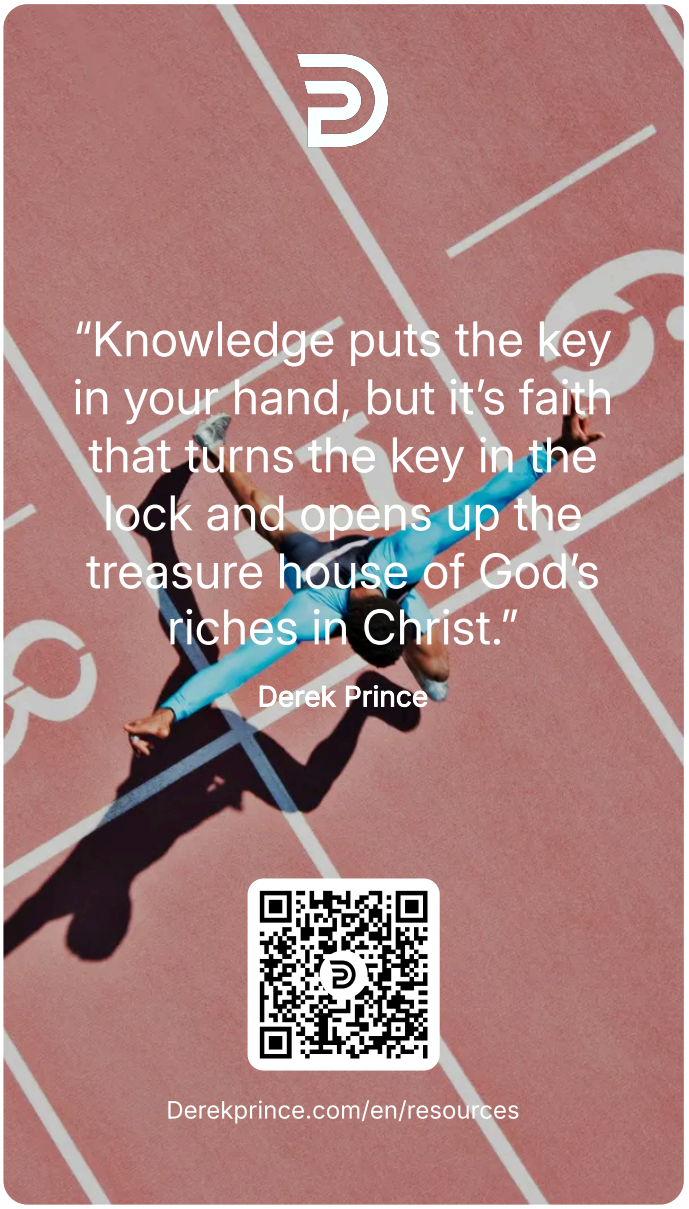
Those three achievements go together. If you are going to keep the faith, you have to fight the fight. Faith is a fight. You cannot escape the fight and keep the faith. If you are going to finish your course, you've got to fight the fight. Paul said, "I've done all three. I've finished the race. I've fought the fight. I've kept the faith." Then he said, "From now on I'm waiting for the prize-giving."

> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me on that Day ... (2 Timothy 4:8)

Paul had been condemned to execution by a very unjust, unrighteous ruler—the Emperor Nero. There had been no justice in his trial, but he said that isn't the last word. He said there's going to be another judgment day. There's going to be a prize-giving. And the judge will be absolutely just. It'll be the Lord Himself, and He will give me my prize—my victor's crown.

For many years of my life, prize-giving was a very important part of my school days. And I won many prizes. But there is one prize that still has to be won, and that is only for those who keep the faith, fight the fight, and finish the course. I believe that Paul was true to the end because he saw something beyond time. He looked out into eternity, and he saw the great prize-giving when the gold, silver and bronze medals will be given out. And I think some of us will be rather surprised at who gets the gold medals. It won't be the speed with which we ran. It will be the faithfulness with which we served. The Lord's emphasis is on faithfulness. Remember Jesus' words: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

For many of us, the days that lie ahead are days that are going to test our endurance. They are not going to be easy. The persecution we endure is going to test one thing above all others: our loyalty—both to the Lord and to the body of Christ. I want to be able to look at my brothers and sisters and say, "I've kept the faith. I haven't been disloyal. I haven't betrayed you." I really believe that's the test that lies ahead of us: the test of character and loyalty. If you will stand the test, glory to God, you will come out like gold that has been tried in the fire.



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