

YOU HAVE NEED OF ENDURANCE

Ben Janssen | **Hebrews 10:32-39** | July 7, 2019

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

The Christian life is a race, a race we must run and a race we must complete (Heb 12:1). We get winded and weary and are often tempted to quit. We have need of endurance.

The Christian life is a journey, a journey through a foreign land where we must live as sojourners and exiles (1 Pet 2:11). We get tired of being different from those around us and are tempted to forget our identity and adopt the practices of the culture around us. We have need of endurance.

The Christian life is a fight, a war we must wage and a battle we must win (1 Tim 6:12). We don't wrestle against other human beings, against flesh and blood, but are tempted to surrender to “the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph 6:12) and to give in to the indulgence of the flesh. We have need of endurance.

If we're going to finish the race and survive the journey and win the war which seeks to ruin faith in our great high priest, all of us are going to need some endurance.

The passage before us today is similar to what we saw in Hebrews 6, where a strong word of warning (Heb 6:4-6) is followed by an equally strong word of encouragement (Heb 6:9-12). This passage is a mirror to that one. The Preacher does not hold back when he sounds the warning to the congregation. But he also does not fail to show his confidence in the power of God that he sees within them. This is not only good relational advice; it is good pastoral advice. It is how endurance is fueled.

You can't fuel endurance by warning alone; you also need encouragement. And our Preacher is a master encourager. He shows us how we can do the same for each other, how we can, by way of encouragement, “provoke one another to love and good works” (Heb 10:24). Endurance is fueled by the encouragement that comes as we remember examples from the past, find joy in the present, and look to the promise for the future.

EXAMPLES FROM THE PAST

First, we find encouragement to endure by remembering examples of endurance from the past. The Preacher wants his congregation to “recall the former days” in which they had “endured a hard

struggle with sufferings” (v. 32). Recounting experiences like these can provide us with a lot of fuel for endurance.

Recognizing the Situation

Whatever situation these believers were in now, the Preacher wants to remind them that they have been there before. In verses 32-34, he reminds them of a specific moment in their corporate experience in which they had together experienced a real testing of their faith, shortly after they had become Christians.¹

This testing, this “hard struggle” came in the form of both involuntary and voluntary suffering. They were forced to endure being “publicly exposed to reproach and affliction” and had even had their property seized from them. History records the situation the Preacher may well be referring to. In AD 49, the Roman emperor, Claudius, expelled all Jews from Rome, including Jewish believers, perhaps even because of Jewish believers and their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. An event like this would surely have involved widespread looting of the property of the expelled people who would have also been exposed to all kinds of verbal and physical assaults.²

Even those who had not suffered in this involuntary way found themselves suffering through their voluntary partnership and association with those who had been imprisoned because of their faith. In Roman society, there was a great deal of pressure to disassociate from those who were in prison.³ The prisoners themselves often depended on food and sustenance from friends, so to maintain the relationship was a necessity for the prisoner but a dangerous commitment for their associates.⁴ Let’s just say, partnering with a prisoner was not exactly a great business deal.

The Distant Past in Recent Memory

Few, if any, of us here today have experienced anything close to what these early Christians had experienced. Still, we can see how much fuel for endurance there is in remembering the experiences of the past. When I coached little league baseball, I would often say to a kid who struggled to hit the baseball in a game to “remember practice” the day before when he had succeeded in making contact. He had done it before; why couldn’t he do it again?

This is a well-known psychological reality that fuels endurance in a difficult situation. Nick Hughes is a personal defense expert who wrote a book called [*How to Be Your Own Bodyguard*](#). He talks about the importance of “contact response drills” that are used to produce pre-conditioned responses in a moment of crisis. The whole purpose of these drills is to create an automatic response to a difficult situation because, the faster a person can complete the OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) the more likely they are to succeed in the crisis they are facing.⁵

As followers of Jesus, we face the same threat to give up on our faith that these early Christians faced, even if not for the same reasons. And the fuel for endurance is to remember how we have endured through trials in the past and how others have done the same. Perhaps you have specific examples of this in your own life. If not, you can read Christian biographies and see examples from the lives of ordinary Christians like you in the past.

The Collective Memory

There is also the need for us to maintain a collective memory of endurance. Every church will go through times of crisis and challenge, of disappointment and failure, of hardship and headache. Are we eager to “forget the past”? Or should we redeem it by reminding each other through celebration and memorial of the challenges we’ve faced together along the way?

Perhaps you don’t feel like a “strong” Christian. Well, none of us are. Every single one of us is susceptible to giving up. If you don’t think that’s true for you, let me just say that “stronger” Christians than you have fallen. You could be next.

But every single one of us can make it if we have fuel. And the fuel for endurance is the encouragement that comes from God’s grace among us in the past.

JOY IN THE PRESENT

There’s a second way to encourage endurance, not only by the examples from the past but also by finding joy in the present. This is counterintuitive, but it is powerful. If we can find joy in a moment of great difficulty, it will keep us encouraged and able to endure.

Supernatural Strength in Suffering

Joy is supernatural strength in suffering. It is striking when you see it. It catches your attention. Surely you take notice when you read in verse 34 that when these believers had had their property plundered, they accepted it with joy. *With joy?* Who does that? I highly doubt that if I came over to your house and started plundering your property, you would take it joyfully.

And what would does look like anyway? It certainly doesn’t mean that these believers had found the plundering of their possessions to be *enjoyable*. Something is wrong if you think suffering is fun. The Christian perspective on suffering is not denial. It is not self-inflicted pain. It is not, “Hey this is fun! Do it to me some more!” Where persecution exists, we ask God for relief. We want it to end, just like any sane person would want it to end. So verse 34 is not a verse about giving away your possessions as if our possessions in this life are inherently evil and stand in the way of joy.

On the other hand, to suffer with joy means more than merely putting up with, enduring, or tolerating the suffering. The attitude of these believers is more than calmness and composure.⁶ Joy involves to some degree a sense of eagerness. It demands an explanation. Why would these believers experience joy in a moment of suffering?

The Preacher tells us that the reason for their joy was because they “knew” that they “had a better possession and an abiding one” (v. 34). Like a chess champion who joyfully forfeits his queen in order to bait his opponent into checkmate, the believer is enabled to joyfully accept every kind of loss imaginable because he knows that although there is a loss, he hasn’t really lost.

The Eyes of Faith

How did they know that in the midst of losing their possessions, they had better possessions anyway? Could they see these better possessions? Yes, they could, but not in the same way they could see these other possessions being plundered. One commentator explains it this way. He says that these believers were in “a spiritual condition” which enabled them to see and to celebrate “greater realities than those immediately observable.”⁷ Not unlike the chess champion, they could see what others could not see.

This ability to see is a supernatural ability because joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). It comes from God. It is not something that can be produced apart from God. Not this kind of joy. On the other hand, this supernatural ability is not a secret ability, given only to a few “special” Christians. It is, in another sense, quite ordinary, and God intends for all of us who are followers of Jesus to have it. To get it you don’t have to do anything special. You don’t have to get into an altered state of consciousness or “second level” Christianity.

The Forging of Joy

How, then, do you get it? The Bible has much to say about this, and over and over again what it tells us is that there is a profound relationship between suffering and supernatural, Spirit-wrought joy. It isn’t that suffering *causes* the joy, as if you can’t have it without suffering. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, not a fruit of suffering. And yet, the suffering, the loss, casts light on this kind of joy so that it is seen to be the supernatural fruit of the Spirit that it truly is.

So while joy is not dependent upon suffering, we should not expect to find it apart from suffering. The two go hand-in-hand. So, for example, Jesus says,

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt 5:11-12).

And the Apostles took this to heart. For we read in Acts 5:41, “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”

One commentator puts it this way, “Present sufferings are to be expected and welcomed as steps on the road which leads to final salvation.”⁸ Which is why we read in 1 Peter 4:13-14, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings.... If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (1 Pet 4:13-14).

Joy’s Perspective

Perhaps we can say it like this: *joy is a different perspective on a present moment of Christian struggle.* It is a perspective the Holy Spirit enables us to take so that we look at the struggle differently than we otherwise would. James can tell us to “count it all joy ... when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2) because he knows the Holy Spirit within every true believer enables us to look at things in a different way.

When, in the midst of suffering and loss, we find joy and satisfaction because of an interest in better things, says John Owen, it is a testimony of “an experience of the excellency of the love of God in Christ.”⁹ It is from this perspective, the perspective of one who is loved by God, that can make us able to find joy in the present.

It is possible that you know nothing about this because you do not know this love. But it is also quite possible that you do know it. You’ve tasted it before, at some time in the past, even when you had to endure some real test of your faith but found Jesus to be satisfying in the midst of it. We need this joy again to give us the proper perspective in our present struggle.

PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

You see, the Christian life is a race, a fight, a journey. It is difficult. Whether it is “fighting without or fear within,” with the Apostle Paul it seems that we are “afflicted at every turn” (2 Cor 7:5). But the God of the Bible is a God “who comforts the downcast” (2 Cor 7:6). And the ultimate comfort, the ultimate encouragement for endurance, is a promise. Not only do we have examples from the past and not only is there supernatural joy for the present, but there is a promise for the future that keeps us running and fighting and moving forward.

A Great Reward

The promise is that better and abiding possession (v. 34). In verse 35 it is called “a great reward.” So the Preacher says, “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.” You can almost hear him now, like a coach cheering on his athlete entering the final stretch of a grueling contest. “Don’t give up now! You’ve come so far! You’re almost there! You’re going to win!”

Yes, this might be the toughest stretch yet. Christian, the road ahead of you might well get harder than anything you’ve ever faced before. We aren’t doing each other any favors if we suggest otherwise. The heresy of prosperity theology, of health-and-wealth teaching, is that it offers far too small of a reward. If you are working under the assumption that God intends for things to get easier and easier and better and better for you in this life, then you are not going to endure when you fail again or when the cultural mood changes and being a Christian organization not only fails to bring in more customers but drives them away instead.

You need something better than the promise of a healthy body and a comfortable bank account and a bigger house. You need a greater reward than that.

The Will of God Is Hard

And you need a better grasp on the will of God. The “will of God” is often glamorized by Christians. We talk about “finding the will of God” like it is the key to a successful life. But the Preacher says, “you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (v. 36). In other words, the reward is great, but it comes after the will of God, and the will of God is hard.

Jesus came to do God's will, we remember from Hebrews 10:7, and this will involved suffering the death of the cross. Why should his servants expect their path to be easier?¹⁰ The way the early church made disciples, "strengthening the souls" of other followers of Jesus, was by "encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

God's people have always had to live like this. We will read later on about Moses who "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" because "he was looking to the reward" (Heb 12:26). We don't stay Christians because it is a good option. That won't work. What we need is to know that it is the best option, the only option, the only one that will "win," that will deliver in the end "a great reward."

But the reward is still ahead of us. We are in need of endurance because in this life we "possess the realities of which God has spoken only in the form of promise." The will of God for us is that we conduct our "lives in the light of the divine promise."¹¹ This is how God's people have always lived; it is the way we must live.

Living by Faith

It is what is called "living by faith," and these are the words of the prophet Habakkuk (Hab 2:3-4), words the Preacher cites in verses 37-38. It is the only way to live as a Christian. It is the only way to please God. Those who do not live by faith cannot please God. Those who do not live by faith are those "who shrink back and are destroyed."

To live by faith is not to live by our gut or by our guess as to what might end up coming to pass. To live by faith is to live with the expectation that "the coming one will come." It's a reference to the Messiah, to the Christ, to Jesus and his Second Coming. It's this kind of faith that endures through various hardships because it is this kind of faith that sees the reward. The Reward is not a "shiny new object." The Reward is a Person. The Reward is Christ. To live by faith is to long for Christ and his appearing.

You know this is true, but perhaps you've forgotten that this is what being a Christian is all about. No wonder you are disappointed and near to giving up, because you've been pursuing so many less important rewards. Perhaps you've gotten what you've been after, or perhaps you haven't. But still you are disappointed.

What do you need? You need endurance. You need to be encouraged by what Christ has done in you in the past. You need to be reminded of the better, abiding Reward that awaits you in heaven. And you need to keep your eyes there. Right there. Keep your eyes on Christ. He is coming. And he is your Reward. Don't give up now.

¹ The phrase, "after you were enlightened," as in Hebrews 6:4 is a reference to "the saving illumination of the heart and mind mediated through the preaching of the gospel" (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker [Dallas: Word Books, 1991], [298](#)). Many commentators equate this "enlightenment" with baptism but it refers to a time in a

person's life that is more broad than that. What we today call the moment a person gets "saved" or "makes a profession of faith" (a time which ordinarily is accompanied by baptism) fits the meaning of this word. Consequently, all true Christians have been "enlightened" but not all "enlightened" persons are Christians, as Hebrews 6:4 suggests and as John 1:9 would affirm.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), [269](#).

³ Dan Nässelqvist, "Imprisonment," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), [n.p.](#)

⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, [270](#).

⁵ See "Podcast #513: Be Your Own Bodyguard," at www.artofmanliness.com/articles/podcast-513-be-your-own-bodyguard.

⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, [271](#).

⁷ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry C. Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), [359](#).

⁸ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), [549](#).

⁹ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Works of John Owen, ed. W. H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), [572](#).

¹⁰ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, [272](#).

¹¹ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, [303](#).