

Principled Living (Part 7): Enduring to the End

Courageous Resistance

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Running a marathon, to state the obvious, is no walk in the park. A marathon is a grueling, arduous race. It takes place over various grades and terrains and it stretches out 26 miles and 385 yards. It lasts about 2 hours and 5 minutes at best. (The world record is just under 2 hours and 5 minutes.)

Most marathons take place on public streets. So, these athletes are running on asphalt or concrete. They run uphill and downhill. Sometimes those up hills and down hills are steep, sometimes they are gradual. And who is to say which is more fatiguing? The short steep stretch? Or that long, gradual uphill?

Sometimes these athletes have to deal with wind and rain. They are seldom called off for inclement weather. They just go. Other times it is scorching hot sun and parching dry air, like the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

No, a marathon is not a walk in the park. Many world class athletes have been humbled by the marathon. I just mentioned the 1984 Summer Olympics. Many of you will remember that. In that Olympics, according to Charlie Lovett in his book, "Olympic Marathon,"

Swiss competitor, Gabriele Andersen-Scheiss, entered the Los Angeles Coliseum suffering from heat exhaustion. The crowd gasped in horror as Andersen-Scheiss staggered onto the track, her torso twisted, her right arm straight, and her left arm limp; her right knee strangely stiff. She waved away a medical personnel who rushed to help her, knowing that if they touched her, she would be disqualified. For nearly six minutes Andersen-Scheiss hobbled around the track, occasionally stopping and holding her head. Doctors watched her carefully and determined she was in no immediate danger. She collapsed over the finish line in 3th place into the arms of waiting medics. Fortunately Andersen-Scheiss recovered quickly. Her time of two hours, 48 minutes, 45 seconds, would have won the gold medal in the first 5 Olympic Marathons.

More recently, just in this past Olympics, British runner, Paula Radcliffe suffered perhaps a worse and certainly more humiliating breakdown during the Marathon in Athens, Greece. This is what the BBC reported:

A distraught Paula Radcliffe saw her dream of Olympic gold shattered after pulling out of the Women's Marathon at the 23 mile mark in

Athens. The British world record holder and pre-race favorite, had slipped to fourth, and was clearly in distress in the blazing heat and humid conditions. The 30 year old was later taken by ambulance for a precautionary check-up. After breaking down at the side of the road, Radcliffe was accompanied by her husband and coach, Jerry Lough, and her parents, to the medical centre at Panathinaiko Stadium, scene of the Marathon finish. It is thought that the two time London marathon winner was tired and exhausted, rather than seriously injured in any way.

I have seen video of both of these events. And they are really agonizing to watch.

But, Andersen-Scheiss, the Swiss runner, has something on Paula Radcliffe. You see, Andersen-Scheiss finished her race.

In other words, despite all that happened to her, and around her, Andersen-Scheiss set her mind to finish the marathon, and she literally willed her body across that finish line.

In biblical terms, we would say she endured to the end.

The Christian course, obviously, is like a marathon, in that it is a long haul from our calling to our glorification. It may last 30, 40, 50, 60 years! God makes most of us run up and down the hills of life in all sorts of conditions before He places the victor's crown on our heads.

If you turn to James 5:11, I would like to begin here. James speaks a great deal about endurance. In a way, he finishes his epistle, here, with a bang on this idea of endurance.

But for right now, I would like to only pick out verse 11. He writes:

James 5:11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

This verse comes at the end of I guess you could call it a short discourse on patience, and it begins up there in verse 7 and it runs down through verse 11. However, verses 4-10 speak primarily of the Greek concept of "makrothumia." This is the Greek word describing patience with people, primarily. It is often translated in the Bible, especially modern translations, rather than patience, it is translated forbearance or longsuffering.

However, the apostle switches gears here in verse 11, and uses the word, "hupomone."

Hupomone is related in meaning to makrothumia, but it has quite a different application. Both endure in verse 11 and perseverance (or patience) also in verse 11, are forms of hupomone.

I should tell you that hupomone means "to remain under." Hupo is under, mone is remain or stay. Originally the verb form of hupomone meant "to stay behind," or even "to stay alive." Why is this?

Greeks used hupomone to describe soldiers who volunteered to hold a position while the rest of

the army moved on. This could be in various forms.

Let us say that they conquered a town, and a detachment would be told to stay behind, and to stay alive—meaning to hold that area behind them as part of what they had already won.

It could also be a group of soldiers who are detached to form a rear-guard action to cover the escape of the Greek army. So they were told to stay behind and stay alive.

It is not hard to see how it came to mean "to stand fast," or "to stand firm," "to resist," "to hold one's ground," or "to be immovable."

You can see that those things that a rear-guard or detachment would have to do in order to stay alive—they would have to resist, stand firm, hold their ground, and be immovable.

And it is an easy jump from there to its New Testament meaning "to endure," or "to bear under," or "to wait for;" even "to suffer," because if you were one of those in the rear-guard trying to hold your ground against an advancing army, you probably would suffer.

So, a good, easy definition of "hupomone" is "courageous endurance."

Remember a moment ago that I said that it has a different application than "makrothumia." The difference is that hupomone deals with circumstances, primarily, rather than people. Although, people will obviously be involved in the circumstances. But one's endurance has to do with the whole situation, rather than one's long suffering with the people who may be causing the problem.

The emphasis, then, is on the whole circumstance, not a person who may be the cause for our need for endurance and patience.

Let me give you an example of this: You would need to apply makrothumia towards your neighbor for waking you up by starting his lawn mower under your window at daybreak on the Sabbath. You would have to apply forbearance. You would have to be patient with your neighbor for waking up like that. You may not be pleased, but you would be forbearing.

In contrast, you would need to apply hupomone to deal with your insomnia. That was the bigger circumstance. You are not getting enough sleep.

Let us try another example. This is perhaps more serious, and more spiritual in nature.

You would need makrothumia in responding to someone who is persecuting you, perhaps a judge, or a prosecuting lawyer, or even some enemy on the street who is doing something against you because of your beliefs. But, you would need hupomone to bear up under the strain of the persecution itself.

Another way to look at this is that in most cases makrothumia is outgoing, and toward another person. Notice these terms: outgoing and toward another person. Whereas, hupomone is internal, and under a stressful circumstance.

I do not know if that helps you any, but it helps me when I try to think about these things.

Makrothumia is toward another person. It is outgoing. Hupomone is something you bear under (a change in preposition). It is something that you deal with yourself. It is not something

projected to another person.

Now, I am not done yet.

Most of the time in your King James Version, hupomone is translated as "patience." It is not terribly wrong, because sometimes it has a shade of patience. But patience tends to be passive. Patience is usually something you just simply take and wait for something to pass.

Hupomone, which is better translated as endurance or perseverance, "has the active significance of energetic, if not necessarily successful, resistance." (*The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*)

So, hupomone is not merely waiting for the trail to be over, but it is vigorously attempting to overcome it; or at least not to succumb to it. Remember, hupomone means standing fast. It is courageous endurance.

So at the very least, it is not succumbing to the trial, persecution, or difficulty, whatever it happens to be. But, it can be more proactive than that. It can be actively, vigorously, and energetically resisting whatever is coming against you—actually trying to overcome it! Conquer it! Be victorious over it!

You know those men in the rear-guard, they just did not sit there and stand their ground. They wanted to beat the other army, if they could. At the very least, though, they wanted to stand, and that is what hupomone means.

At the very least, stand fast, hold your ground, do not give up any of what you have won. But, if you can, pick up some ground! Gain ground! Defeat the enemy! Send them packing!

Do you see the difference between patience and endurance in the biblical sense?

It is not passive. Hupomone can be quite active, almost offensive rather than merely defensive.

Look at this for a moment in the life of the apostle Paul. The last 10 chapters or so of Acts, what is he doing? He is in jail! He had been arrested at the Temple and he goes through this fiasco in Jerusalem and he says he wants to go to Caesar.

Well, he goes before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, before he is even packed off to Rome. It was at least two years (it may have been more) between the time he was arrested in Jerusalem, and the time that he got on the boat to go to Rome.

Let us put patience and endurance into this story.

Paul was patient in waiting for the slow wheels of Roman justice to turn. He waited for his day in court, you might say. But, he exercised hupomone in defending himself energetically before all those officials. How many times does he tell his story? It is at least twice if not three times. And then, he went to Rome, and did the same thing. And how many years was he in Rome before he got the chance to give his case? But, he defended himself as a Roman citizen.

Not only did he stand fast in his protestations of innocence, but he actually went on the offensive in clearing his name—clearing himself so he could go out and preach the gospel again.

So, he was patient through all this time, maybe as much as four or five years out of his life,

that all of this took place. But, he used hupomone to get himself out of it—to stand. Obviously God had a lot to do with it. But, Paul had to exercise the endurance, not just defending himself, but trying to go out there and win his case.

To summarize, hupomone is courageous endurance of a situation with the implication of active resistance, or at least standing fast and not giving up any ground.

If you will, please turn to Hebrews 10. The book of Hebrews actually has much to say about endurance because it was a church that needed this quality. They were actually going the other direction, and the author (Let us just say Paul, who I believe was actually the original inspiration behind this, if not the actual writer) felt that they very much needed this. Let us read verses 32-39 as he is winding up his arguments, and getting down to some brass tacks:

Hebrews 10:32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

There is the word endure. He is showing them from their own example how they used to do it.

Hebrews 10:33 Partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

So not only did they go through it themselves, they saw their brethren go through it also. So, they had lots of good examples.

Hebrews 10:34 For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring [there is the word again] possession for yourselves in heaven.

So, they had Paul's example too. And they did what was right. They, he uses the word "joyfully" here, allowed themselves to be stolen from knowing that their reward was not in physical things, but something greater reserved by God for them. Then, Paul gets to a conclusion.

Hebrews 10:35-39 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry [delay]. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition [destruction], but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Paul is writing to a church that had been vigorous and growing, had been faithful; they had a confidence here. They had done things right. They had been persevering.

But over time they had backslid quite a bit. They had come from being mature Christians, and had regressed to the point of needing milk (he said at the end of chapter 5), and not solid meat. They could no longer understand the more difficult areas of Christianity. They had regressed to the point where they had lost a great deal of their understanding. And so they needed to be taught again.

And one of the things that they needed was endurance; the kind of hupomone—that steadfast resistance, that courageous endurance—that they had lost over the years. They did not need to wait. Patience was not the problem. It was endurance that they lacked. They were not resisting. They were not holding their ground. They needed to stand firm because they had already lost a great deal, they did not want to lose any more. So, they needed to put their standard into the ground and say, "This far, and no further."

So, Paul says, "You need to use the confidence that you have. You need to muster all the courage, and mount a defense of your faith to get back on the track." I think it is interesting, here, that Paul says in verse 38 that God will have no pleasure in retreat. They must stay behind. They must stay alive.

Is that not what hupomone originally meant?

He was saying, "Hebrews! You have to fight a rear-guard action. You have to stand right here." (Remember he told this to the Ephesian Church as well.) "At least to stand," he says. "Put on the whole armor of God. But the least that you could do is to stand!" He is telling the Hebrews the same thing. "Look! You have let so much slip away that it is time to take a stand and defend the turf that you still have."

And you do it by faith. That is where the confidence comes in. God will back you up. He will take you to your reward, as it were, not in the euphemistic sense of dying, but in the sense of giving you what you need to grow and overcome.

We can see from this, from Paul's use of this kind of language, that the Christianity that Paul taught is not some passive, mealy-mouthed, weak-kneed religion. Hardly! He uses military terms about strong resistance, and battling the enemy with the spiritual weapons that are at hand.

Let us go back to II Corinthians 10 and see what he is getting at. It would be an interesting study to go through Paul's epistles just picking up the military terms that he brings in. I am not saying that Paul taught a militaristic Christianity, but he certainly used the metaphor of fighting, holding one's ground, going up against the enemy considerably throughout his epistles. Verse 3:

II Corinthians 10:3-6 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [fleshly, physical, material] but mighty in God [spiritual] for pulling down strongholds, [destructive defenses that we have built up in ourselves. We are to use these weapons] casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity [or every intent of the mind] to

the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

I get the impression from this that we have to go at this like a general marshalling his forces. We have to muster all that we can in our fight against Satan, against this world, against our own minds, that have built up these resistances, and smash them down as well as we can with, what he says here, weapons that are mighty in God.

What Paul is saying in Hebrews 10: 38 is that retreat never wins spiritual battles. Standing firm on the principles of God's Word always wins spiritual battles.

And as we saw there from II Corinthians 10, the war is waged in the mind, and the results (I can tell you) are displayed in our speech and our behavior. Because if we fight against our mind's defenses, which is anything our mind has done to give us excuses for not doing what God says, and once we break down the barriers in our mind against doing what God wants us to do, then we will begin acting on what we believe.

Suppose we have a problem with smoking, just as an example. And we make a justification for why smoking is ok. Even though we know that smoking is going to be very detrimental to our health, it is going to defile the temple of God's Spirit, it is in a way, slow suicide. It is not showing love. All those are arguments for why smoking should not be done by a Christian.

Well, if we batter down those justifications then what is going to happen? If the truth suddenly takes hold in our minds, and we believe it, we are going to stop smoking. (Smoking was the only thing I could come up with off the top of my head but it will have to do.)

The things that take place in our minds are going to show up in our behavior. It is that simple. Whether it is in speech or action.

Turn to back to James. I want to pick up this one verse, and then we will go to I Peter. This is a beatitude:

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

I Peter 5:8-11 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Just like James and Paul, Peter calls for steadfast resistance in the faith. This is not hupomone, but it means the basically the same thing.

The phrase, "resist him steadfast in the faith" means, "a sure or stable opposition." It is very

much like hupomone in that regard in planting one's standard and saying, "this far and no further."

It implies a prolonged struggle. Let us say you are in a besieged castle, and the enemy is out there, and is constantly battering away at the defenses. Peter says, "Resist with steadfastness!"

In modern terms we might say, "Never give in to Satan." Or we might say, "Counter his every feint and tactic for as long as it takes." This is what true Christian endurance is all about—holding on, holding fast, standing firm no matter how long it takes, because it might take 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, 50 years.

I look back and think about how long I have been in the church of God, and I consider myself a young man, but I was baptized in 1984. It has already been 21 years. Seems just like yesterday. But, that is a long time. That is more than half my life. I was born and grew up in the church of God, and so there was all that time before that. You cannot really count it in that sense, but it is a long time to hold on.

The Christian life is not easy. Endurance is not easy. Holding on for as long as one needs to hold on is going to take a lot out of you. And it is going to take all that you have to give, but that is what God has called us to. He has called us to be that rear guard to resist, to hold off the enemy, to stand our ground.

James says (in 1:12), "This endurance is part of the process that God uses to prove us, to test us, and even qualify us." People do not like that term, but it is valid. Why would He give us these tests if there were not qualifications? He wants to see what we are made of. He wants to see if we will fit in, if we will submit to Him, if we will make good members of His family.

And so, He puts us through this test of enduring whatever is thrown against us. It does not matter what it is. But, He wants to see what we have got. And part of what He wants to see, in His children, is the ability to be absolutely immovable on the principles that really matter.

So He is going to throw us questions about doctrine. He is going to throw us situations where we will be tempted to do something against what He says. He is going to see how we react when we get angry. He is going to see if we can endure trial after trial after trial, and still hold firm. Then, He may give us a rest, and things may go swimmingly for a long time. And during those swimming times He is testing us to see how we do with the good times.

He is going to throw anything and everything at us to *prove* us. He wants solid gold from us. He wants nothing that is going to be impure. And so, He tests us. And He makes sure that He not only tests us in little things, but also big things, quick things, long term things with our families, our jobs, with our activities in the world, our acquaintances, you name it, we are going to get tested because He wants only the best in His family, especially among the first fruits.

So, no one who cuts and runs once a bit of trouble shows its ugly head will be in the kingdom of God. Do you know that it says there in Revelation 21:8 that the cowardly are going into the lake of fire?

That is why! He wants to be able to send any one of His children to take care of any problem at any time, and know that it is going to get done.

That is why Paul says in Hebrews 10: 38 that God is not pleased with those who shrink back. He does not want retreaters. He does not want yellow-bellies. He does not want cowards. He wants those who are going to stand.

I hope that you may have also noticed that on the flipside that Paul, Peter, and James all mention the positive results of standing and enduring. They all mentioned it in every one of these passages we have gone through.

Paul mentioned in Hebrews 10 that Christ was returning, bringing us the salvation of our souls. That we would have our ultimate glorification. In James 1: 12, he mentions that we will be given the crown of life that He has promised all those who do these things.

Peter mentions speaks here of our calling to eternal glory in verse 10, and he also speaks about even after we have suffered that God is going to perfect us, establish us, strengthen us, and settle us. There is always positive results for enduring.

Where do they get this idea?

They get it from their Savior, of course. He is the One who mentioned it first. Turn to Matthew 10. This is where Jesus is sending out His disciples, giving them a pep talk before they left. This is a rather long section. But I want you to notice His emphasis upon endurance.

Matthew 10:16-23a Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another?

Notice there that He does not say, "Take it." In our rear guard action we have to be smart on the one hand—wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. So He says:

Matthew 10:23-26 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. [You do not have to take it.] For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. [Which is a back-handed way of saying that this will take a while.] A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they call those of his household!

Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

Turn to Matthew 24 and see another one. Obviously this is the Olivet prophesy. He is talking about the great martyrdom at the end.

Matthew 24:9 Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. [Very similar to what He said in chapter 10] And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Both of these exhortations to endure to the end are in the context of major persecutions. In the one He is talking about the persecutions through the times of the church, and you get the impression that it would be fairly constant. There would be times of peace, but that for the most part, since they persecuted Jesus, they are going to persecute his disciples. And so, wherever there are disciples, eventually there will be persecutions. And so He says, "Look! Things are going to be going on for a long time, and it is to your best advantage to endure to the end, because that is the way that you are going to be saved."

The other one takes place at a specific time. It is mostly in the context there in chapter 24, the time of the end when the worst persecution of all will take place. And, the same rules apply. Those who endure to the end will be saved. It is not going to be any different, only worse there at the end. And the same way of dealing with it at the end is the way that it has been dealt with all along. One must stand firm, hold his ground, and endure.

So we can say, then, that enduring to the end is a constant necessity for a Christian.

But, do not let this idea of these extreme situations of great persecution throw you. The reason why I say this is that it does not matter what the situation is, we always have need for endurance. We have to endure situations that do not reach the level of persecution, but which can be classified as part of this spiritual war that we are fighting.

Just take your own situation, for example.

Are you facing persecution? Are the police coming and hauling us out of our homes and taking us to prison? Are Christians here in America being set afire? Are they being set before firing squads? Are they being electrocuted? Are they being put into concentration camps? No.

We have it pretty good here in America. We find freedoms being eroded. But, all in all, for Christians, it is a pretty "easy" time (and I put that in quotes because it is not an easy time), there is still a need for endurance because Satan the Devil is out there. He is always in attack mode. And when he cannot get you with blood, and guts, and fire, bullets and barbed wire and whatnot, he is going to be more subtle. What is the first thing said in the Bible about the Satan the Devil? He is more subtle than anything or any creature. So if he cannot kill you he will just

take away your eternal life, if you give him the chance.

We are in the middle of a culture war. And that can be just as bad to a Christian, just as detrimental to a Christian's salvation as any hot war. Because, remember where the battle takes place? It is in the mind.

The culture war is one of the things that we have to be worried about right now. Do we realize that the culture war is indeed a spiritual war? It is for our minds and hearts. It is to turn us from God to something else. Satan does not care what it is that we turn to. All he cares about is that we turn from God, we can do anything we want, he does not care, as long as we give our loyalties to something else other than God.

Do you realize that what you watch on television, read in newspapers and magazines, observe on the internet, or hear over your radios are in many cases direct assaults against our faith?

Do we resist courageously? Do we steadfastly resist them, or do we concede ground to them little by little by little by little? I will be frank. I think most of us are giving ground. Maybe baby steps, but I think that under the onslaught of what we have to face today, we are not enduring. I think that most of us are slowly being ground down under an avalanche of satanic culture. And, it is happening so slowly, and so surreptitiously, and so slyly, and so *oblatantly* that our resistance is crumbling more quickly than ever.

I will not be specific, necessarily, but I want to ask some questions. I hope you will ask them of yourself because we are faced with the culture war constantly. You cannot drive down the highway and not be faced with the culture war. It is on the radio, it is on the billboards, it is in the people as they whiz by, and what they are doing. There are these constant little attacks to make us think that it will not be so bad to conform just this one time.

Here on Interstate 77 going toward Charlotte, there are billboards for homes, restaurants, and there is one with a lady in barely half a square foot of material and on the top of the billboard there is the title, "Ideal Image." It shows this lady in a bathing suit just there for all eyes to see. And, the "ideal image" is this skinny model. This is part of the culture war. How many women drive past that every day, and are assaulted by that sign thinking that they are not acceptable because they do not fit that ideal image? What does it do? It makes them change their behavior. And once they reach that so called ideal image, what do they do with it? I will let you use your own imagination. But, what they are selling is sex.

The questions I was going to ask you:

Has the music you listened to improved or regressed in quality?

Most of you know that I am a NASCAR fan. You would think that most NASCAR fans and the drivers, and all the people associated with them would listen to country music. That is basically where NASCAR got its start, right here in Charlotte. They drove fast cars and listened to country music. And country would go together with NASCAR.

Well, one of my favorite drivers is Mark Martin, he is retiring this year. I was watching a show about NASCAR drivers they go behind them throughout the week, and they kind of tell you what their lives are like outside the track, as well as on it. And I found out that Mark Martin goes with

this son to Best Buy where his son goes and gets buys classic rock music. But, Mark, a 48 year old man, goes and buys rap! He says, "I do not know why I like it, but I just do."

Rap is the most disgusting music I have ever heard—if you can call that music! And the things that they say in those songs are not permitted to be spoken in church—or any time. But, Mark Martin likes rap. Why? It would be better for him to like country music, but that is not much of a step up. And rock music is not either.

So, the question is, how about your taste in music? Are you cultivating it? Or, are you letting it slip into what the world likes, and what the world produces. It is just a question.

How do you dress?

This is a big question for young ladies. But, also for the young men—even all of us.

There is (and you can trace this out) a corresponding decline in dress with every fall of a culture. And, usually the decline in dress means that there is less and less material, and more and more bare skin.

So, has your dress become more refined and cultured? Or has it slipped to being revealing? Being sexual?

I know that with young men today, the idea is to be a bit grungy. That is not the way I was taught. I sometimes feel guilty wearing jeans, but that is as it may be.

How about your speech?

This is another one that you could trace out. Speech, language, and whatnot., always declines as the culture declines. Go back and read some of the things that were written from about 1800 on to about the early 1900s, they knew how to use words! But now, we use things like "c-u-l8r!" I even do this on instant messenger. "See you later!"

The culture has made us fast. We want everything fast and we do not care how we speak. It is much worse than that. I mean, listen to rap. What do they say? There is an expletive every other word. And, these things come right through from our culture right into our homes through television, radio, movies—language is just atrocious.

How about your language? You are a Christian. You are witnessing for God. Is your speech something that you would want a minister to listen to? Or would you be ashamed? Because frankly, God is listening all the time. Are your words real nice at church, but coarse in the world? There is no need for them to be. And, if you are allowing the culture to coarsen your language, then you are giving in. You are not enduring.

How about your reading material? What is that like?

Is it escapist? Is it lurid? Or is it informative and uplifting. Is it helpful? Is it edifying?

What about the types of TV shows that you watch? Do you watch "Will and Grace?" I hope not. You should really be careful about what you watch. And, sometimes, even these "family" shows get their digs in, as it were, on one thing or another, making it seem like it is ok to be whatever—homosexual, promiscuous, among many other things.

Do you look back on your week on Friday night or Sabbath, and realize that you have wasted a great deal of your time in profitless activities? That you are not redeeming the time for the days are evil?

Do you find yourself frequently succumbing to advertisements from the media? I find myself doing this. I listen to the radio a lot. And, it is very likely that if I am given a choice of a set of companies to use for whatever I need to have done around the house, I will pick the one I that is advertised on the radio. And it usually ends up being more expensive. But, it is something I have heard of.

If you find yourself succumbing to advertising, it is actually a sign that the media is influencing you a great deal. Now, it has not bitten me yet on those things. We had our air conditioner go out on Monday, and we called "Brother's Air and Heat" and that is advertised about every other commercial on WBT.

Gage yourself throughout the week. Do you buy the products in the stores that you see advertised, rather than something else that is just as good, but not advertised so well? So therefore, you spend more money and you are being led down the path by someone else. You are not making the choices. You are allowing the advertisers to make the choices for you. Who is in control of your mind? Who is in control of your actions? And decisions? Is it the advertisers? Or is it you?

Do you take time to evaluate the choices that you make? Do not ever believe that these major corporations are lily white in their tactics to get you to buy something. They have agendas too. I am not saying they are all bad, but I am saying that advertising is one of the ways that they choose to change your mind.

Are you trying to "keep up with the Joneses?" If your neighbor gets a new John Deere tractor, does one show up in your driveway the next week? How much money do you have saved for a rainy day? Or, have you allowed the media advertisers to get you to spend all but a few measly dollars? Are you living from pay-check to pay-check because you are out spending money and not saving for a rainy day?

There is an interesting scripture that says that we should be saving for our grandchildren's inheritance. How many of you have something to give to *your children* not just your grandchildren?

Do you find yourself swept along by today's fad, trends, movements, ideas? Do you have to get the latest and greatest in everything?

Do you get swept along in the things you might read about, things that are happening in the news? Do you believe what the media tells you? You know that over the past few years there have been big stories out there about their bias. They all have biases whether liberal or conservative, it does not matter. They all have a bias. Some are just more honest in telling you what their bias is. Some are very slippery and are trying to get you to think that they are telling you the truth, when they are really slanting it in a way to change your mind, or to guide you along on a certain path. Are you resisting and actually going out and seeking the truth on these matters?

And the big one: How much time do you give God in comparison to what you give to the culture of this world? You might want to do something very simple. Make a chart showing the hours of your day. Write down everything that you do. Then go back and evaluate whether this activity or that one was pointed toward God, or whether it was pointed toward the culture.

Then after a week or two, find out how balanced (or imbalanced) the scales are. Do you spend three hours watching television, and three minutes talking to God? That is an imbalance to me. But we all do it do we not? Maybe not to that extreme, but we all do it. We all get caught up in the things of this world.

Are you winning the culture war? Or, are you giving in to it? Are you enduring? Or are you retreating?

Let us turn to Luke 8. This is the explanation of the parable of the sower. I am just going to read through quickly and I want you to see the difference here between the first three, and the last one.

Luke 8:11-15 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. [Finally the fourth one] But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with [hupomone] patience.

My margin says "endurance."

What was the difference between the first three, and the last one?

You could say in a way that the difference was hupomone. There are other factors, of course. But the ones represented by the good ground stick it out. They resist the pulls of Satan, and this world, and their flesh and they let God work in them to produce the fruit all the way to the harvest. They stick around.

In contradistinction to the others in this parable, they have a root which goes down and gives them a firm understanding—they are firmly rooted in that soil. And they are able to endure whatever comes against them—wind, rain, heat, birds, insects, diseases, etc. And they bring forth fruit, it says here, with or in endurance—hupomone.

And this is why Jesus says:

Luke 21:19 By your patience possess your souls.

The word "patience" here is hupomone. "In your hupomone, possess your souls."

In other words, by your courageous energetic resistance, you will secure your lives to salvation. That is my paraphrase of that verse. By the way, that in Luke 21 is very much similar to what we read in Matthew 10.

Let us conclude, then, Hebrews 12. This is where I got my introduction because Paul describes the Christian life as a long distance race, like a marathon.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith [notice: from beginning to end], who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Paul points out the crowd around us comprised of heroes of faith who have already proved themselves to God. They are examples to us. And knowing their examples, we should be motivated to rip away every hindrance to our movement toward God's Kingdom, and put all our energy into finishing our course, no matter how difficult it seems.

In addition, we should see in our mind's eye Jesus waiting to congratulate us on our successful race, and to give us the crown of victory at the finish line, because He is the first and best example of how to endure, how to live with endurance. We will never have to endure as much as He did. Yet our reward for enduring will be to have a share in His wonderful reward! And that should make us want to stand firm for as long as it takes.