

The Need for Endurance

Hebrews 10:32-39—But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Hebrews 11:27—By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Hebrews 12:1-3—Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy 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 has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Let's have another word of prayer:

Lord, we have already expressed our worship and adoration unto You. Lord, the privilege we have of being together in Your presence, we find ourselves just trying many ways through many different words to express it, but we come with grateful hearts unto You because we know that all of our springs of joys are found in You. They are not found anywhere else, and we come tonight, Lord, putting aside everything that would distract us and really turning our eyes upon You. We are thankful that You have made every provision for us in Christ Jesus. We are thankful that we can by faith stand into that provision. We are thankful that we can declare Jesus Christ is Lord over this time. We are thankful that we come with an expectancy of knowing that You want to do above and beyond what we would even ask or think. Lord, we want to be those who are sitting at Your feet. We want to be those who have an ear to hear what You are saying. We would say, "Speak Lord, Thy servants are listening." In Thy wonderful name we pray. Amen.

The Equipping of the Saints for Service

As we come to this time, it is good to remind ourselves of why we are here. We are thankful for the many years that we have been gathering together. And we gather with the desire that the testimony of our Lord in the last days would be strengthened, that we as His people, both individually and as living stones being built together, could find the encouragement and strength in the Lord to press on as we find many things pressing against us. We know how the Lord is yearning and seeking for a people who are prepared that would hasten His return. And it is the desire within our heart that we would be found among those people hastening His return.

I was reminded of a verse in Ephesians 4, which I believe is the purpose of the conference. The conference in itself is not an end; the conference is a means to an end. In Ephesians 4:12 it talks about the work of God which is for the equipping of the saints. We are here for an equipping by the Holy Spirit to do a great work of equipping us for a work of service, not for ourselves alone, but a work of service for the building up of the body of Christ that there would be a glorious testimony unto Him in this last hour. That is why we are here. We have been gathering together for many years with a heart and a desire for Him.

God's Eternal Purpose

As we said this conference is not an end, but it is a means toward His end. What is that end? His end is His eternal purpose, and as we have been meeting together for many years that thought of having God's eternal purpose put before us every year has been an ever recurring theme. We are thankful for the vast and many ways that the Lord has spoken to us. And as we gather again this year we are gathering with a desire to catch that fresh glimpse of His great eternal purpose and the call that He has upon us.

There is another desire we have also, that this will be the last conference because of the Lord's soon return. Thus He will be calling us to Himself and therefore there will not be another conference. But as long as the Lord tarries, we are so grateful to have this privilege of gathering together as a testimony unto Him. And we come with open hearts to sit at His feet and allow Him to speak to us.

God is Doing One Great Work

The theme of this conference this year is: "You have Need of Endurance." But how did we get there? How did we come up with this theme? I am not going to put anyone on the spot, but who remembers the theme of the conference three years ago in 2014? "Behold I Come quickly." Behold I come quickly because the time is at hand, and He is calling a people to be ready. The following year of 2015 we had the

theme, “The Stewards of the Mysteries” because stewards are those who are ready. And that which is required of stewards is to be faithful, and the Lord is looking for ones to be faithful. The precious thing that I was reminded of was the steward of Abraham. As we read about Eliezer, we see how faithful he was to his master, but he was also faithful to the next generation. Eliezer was faithful to Abraham, but he also insured that the testimony was passed on to Isaac and that Isaac entered into it. This is why as we came together last year we had the thought for the conference of “Passing the Torch of the Testimony” so that as long as the Lord carries that torch of the testimony would be maintained. Not only that it would be strengthened and passed on by faithful stewards because He is coming quickly.

The Lord is doing one great work in this hour. There are many things that are being said out there such as: “What is the Lord really doing?” It can look like He is failing, but we are here as a testimony of our Lord doing a great work. Jerry mentioned Nehemiah. Nehemiah looked upon that little wall that he was on and those who were trying to tempt him to come down, and said, “Oh no, I am not coming down there. I am doing a great work.” May the eyes of our hearts be opened to see that we are doing a great work in this last hour. And because of that this theme came about because we see that we have need of endurance.

Why do we have need of endurance? Is it just for our own sakes that we endure? No, that verse out of Hebrews 10 says that we have need of endurance so that when we have done the will of God we may receive what is promised. There is an end in view, and if we do not have that end in view, there is no way we can endure. But as we have that end in view, we will be those who are pressing on. We will be able to do the will of God even during the difficult times because we know there is that precious promise of His return, the promise of Him establishing a kingdom, that promise of that eternal glory with Him. We have great, precious and magnificent promises before us. Let us not shrink back, but let us be those who are really pressing on.

As we are here for this time, may the Lord use this theme, as the various brothers share, in drawing this out in such a fullness that we would see the relevancy of it in the hour we are living in. This is not a theological week nor is it an academic study. But may we use the term: This is an encounter with the living God. And as we have an encounter with the living God, this matter of having this need for endurance will touch our hearts and grab us in a fresh way.

A Great Shaking Among the Hebrew Believers

As we are together I have three questions which are pretty simple.

What is endurance?

What is the purpose of enduring?

How do you practically enter into this enduring?

Before we get into that let us look at the setting for the book of Hebrews. As we look at this letter that was written to those dear ones in Hebrews, we discover that it was written because these dear ones who had once been enlightened, who once had a real encounter and experience with the Lord, were starting to drift and shrink back because of difficult times. Now the times were difficult, nobody will argue that. Christianity was under persecution; it was right before Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, and there was a great shaking going on. Many believers had already been dispersed.

When Paul writes of the house of God in II Timothy, he tragically describes it as a large house full of vessels of honor and also vessels of dishonor. The church was in a weakened condition at that time. Paul and Peter had probably already been martyred by the time this letter had been written. Many false teachers and prophets were arising; there was a shaking going on and there was a great need for a word of encouragement. And the Lord, in His great love, saw how ones were starting to shrink back. They had started to withdraw and had become discouraged from that original calling. So He raised up one to write this letter to the Hebrews in the spirit of encouraging them. Throughout this letter the writer to the Hebrews, who I personally think was Joseph (Barnabas-Acts 4:36), was always encouraging ones over and over again to bring them back to the Lord. And this is what we desire as we are here this week. We want to be those who are encouraged and have that desire to really press on.

The Hebrew Believers had a Strong History with the Lord

We have to remember that these ones to whom this letter was written had a strong history with the Lord. These were not new believers. These were ones who had been walking with the Lord and who had been faithful. They had been enlightened. They had what we call spiritual sight. When we speak of being enlightened, it means that the eyes of our hearts are being opened as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1 which is a familiar verse.

In Ephesians 1:18 Paul prayed: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know [they might have the reality] of the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

To be enlightened is far more than just a mental knowledge; it is more than just a teaching; there is a reality associated with it. And these ones at one time had been enlightened; they had spiritual sight. They saw the Lord in a living way, and it

impacted their lives. But they were starting to lose that sight, that vision of the Lord. We see this characterized greatly in that letter to Laodicea. And out of a heart of love the Lord pens this letter to these dear ones, and He is penning it to us today. Twice in the letter of Hebrews, he says that you have been enlightened. He reminds them of what they had experienced and the reality of their experience.

The Hebrew Saints had been Enlightened

In Hebrews 6:4-5 we see how the Lord describes the impact of being enlightened, of seeing the Lord, of seeing Jesus Christ in a very personal and real way.

He said: “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.”

That is their experience. They tasted of that heavenly gift. They had tasted of the reality in their mouths. They had been partakers in the Holy Spirit. There was a reality of the Spirit of God living and moving and working among them. They tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come. They saw the great power of all that God was doing, but they were shrinking back. And He was speaking these things to remind them to press on just as he did in Hebrews 10:32.

The Writer to Hebrews Calls Them Back to the Lord

He is calling them to remember when they were enlightened. And this word *remember* is not just a casual remembering, but it means to roll them over in your mind, counting them one by one. There is an old hymn we sing: “Count your blessings, name them one by one. See the many things that God has done.” That is the spirit of this remembering. It is to stop and consider, not a casual passing of remembrance, but an intensity of really remembering all that God has done and how when He impacted your life, you did not care about all the suffering, you did not care about what was taken away from you. You stood with your brothers and sisters. When they were going through difficult times, you did not care what it cost you and you came alongside of them. Now you are starting to shrink back. This reality that had transformed your life and had caught you, now you are shrinking back and you are not pressing on. What had changed? It is very simple; their perspective had changed. They were looking at the circumstances of life instead of the Lord. When we start looking at the circumstances of life, it is depressing. But as we see all through Hebrews, the writer over and over again has one way of encouraging these dear ones, and he has one way of encouraging us: he brings us back to the Lord Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us in the Lord bringing us back to Him so many times it is kind of exhausting and extensive to even go through all of them, but I picked a few. I am leaving out more than I am including, but I just want to emphasize the point of how over and over again he says, "You are shrinking back, you are losing sight, but I want you to come back; I want you to see Him." This is the way he starts the letter in Hebrews 1:1-2: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

He has spoken to you, He has spoken to me, He has spoken to each and every one of us in His Son. He has given us that Word; praise God for that. We can take that Word and allow it to impact us. These ones in Hebrews had received that Word and it had transformed their lives, but now they were getting their eyes off of Him.

Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

Whatever we are going through, He has already tasted that death for us and there is a sufficiency in Him.

Hebrews 3:1: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."

Consider Jesus. Focus on Him. Get back to Him.

Hebrews 4:14: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

We have a good confession. Let us not let it slip away. Let us hold fast to the true confession of Jesus Christ being Lord, not only with our tongues but with our very lives. This is the writer to the Hebrews and this is what he is encouraging.

Hebrews 12:2: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Praise God, the writer to Hebrews has one answer to give these dear ones, and it is the Lord Jesus. He not only focuses upon the Person of our Lord, but he focuses upon the work of the Lord, all that He has done. He talks about so great a salvation, how He is bringing many sons to glory, how He is faithful in His house, how He has given us that Sabbath rest, how He has given us a better hope, a better testament, a better covenant, a better promise, a better sacrifice, a better country ahead. There is a fullness of all that the Lord has done for us when He captures our heart. We cannot help but allow the Spirit to work and move in us and bring us back to

that place of the reality of being enlightened and walking in Him as when we first saw Him. This is the Word of God to the Hebrews in the days they were living in when the church was in a weakened condition.

The Lord has One Answer in the Time of Declension

As we find ourselves living in a time when the testimony of God is in a weakened condition, may this letter and this Word become very relevant to us. And may the Lord really work in our hearts and lives. The Lord always has one answer in times of declension, and it is His Son. If you look throughout the Scriptures, you will see that at the end of the New Testament He has only one answer, and that is His Son. Paul concludes in II Timothy when he is talking about the large house, the solution is: "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead." In John's last letter of prophecy in Revelation, what is the essence of that prophecy? It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we try to make things so complicated, but the Lord has a very simple way of recovering, restoring, and refreshing us in this hour, and it is getting our hearts back upon the Lord Jesus. This is the need that we have in this hour, that in a very fresh way we see our Lord Jesus Christ and allow the eyes of our hearts to be refreshed in a new and wonderful way.

We have been blessed with so much teaching and the riches that have been given us. However, we should not allow teaching and knowledge to be substituted for life! It is the life of our Lord that He is jealous for. It is the life of our Lord that we are here this week to encounter. It is the life of the Lord that we want to look off unto and allow Him to do that great work of transforming us and conforming us to His image. It is giving the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place in our individual lives and our lives together as He builds us as living stones for a testimony unto Him.

I was reminded of the apostle John when he saw the Lord. He had an encounter with the Lord that caused him to fall at His feet as dead. This question came to my heart: when was the last time I had such an encounter with the Lord that I fell down as dead? When was the last time the Lord touched me in such a way that I was on my knees? Now I am not looking for an experience; that is not the issue. The issue is our heart attitude and to really be in touch and gripped by Him in a way that we will allow Him to move and transform us and be the testimony that He is calling us to be.

What is Endurance?

Now for the first question: What is endurance? When you heard this theme, what did you think of? I generally heard two responses to this theme of endurance. There is one camp who says, "I know I have not been as diligence, as I should have been, but after this conference I am going to commit myself to try harder, and I am

going to be a better Christian. I am going to suck it up, grit my teeth and bear it out. I can do it; I just need to try harder.” The other side says, “Well, there is no way I can do this. This life is so hard, there is no way I can do it. There are so many things that distract me; there are so many things that are overwhelming; I just give up.”

You have Need of the Lord Jesus

How did the theme verse hit you? Is it like God looking at you and saying in a stern voice: “You have need of endurance!?” Let me rephrase the theme. Instead of you have need of endurance, I am going to change the theme of the conference to say in a simple way: “You have need of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is what we need, and that puts a whole different perspective on it; that revolutionizes it. The Lord is not looking for us to change ourselves, but it is being able to see Him in a fresh way because it is a heart issue. He does not have us here to strengthen ourselves. He is not looking to us to become stronger in ourselves. Actually, the weaker we are, the more His strength is perfected. Praise God for that! For many of us one of our greatest challenges in our Christian life is that we try so hard at being a Christian that we make such a mess of it. But our Lord is saying, “Look at My Son and behold Him.” And really it is allowing the One who has endured to live out His life in us and through us. He is the One who has endured, and He is continuing to endure. He is enduring until that bride makes herself ready. That is the life we have within us. We have this enduring One living within us, and He just wants to break out and rule within our lives and lead us into a fuller experience of the reality of who He is.

Abiding Under During a Difficult Time

When we look at this word *endurance*, you will notice through your various translations that it depends on your translation. Sometimes it uses the word *endurance*, sometimes it uses the word *steadfastness*, and sometimes it uses the word *patience*. It depends on the translation. But if you look at the original Greek definition of it, Vine has for its definition, “to abide under during a difficult time, to bear up courageously under suffering. So it is to abide under that difficult time, not trying to escape, but bearing up courageously under that suffering. It is abiding and remaining under until God accomplishes His purpose. That is what He is after when we are talking about enduring. And we are so thankful that as we look to the Lord, He was One who endured.

Enduring for the Sake of Hastening His Return

I do want to clarify one thing here. When we talk about enduring, it does not mean enduring the effect of our sin. We have a lot of sin; we have a lot of problems, but we are not talking about enduring that. We are not talking about enduring the

wrong decisions we have made in ourselves. When Peter talked about all the various sufferings, he says it is far better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong. When we do something wrong, we will suffer. However, it is suffering for doing what is right, that suffering when God has captured you with His heart and His purpose and there is a willingness to suffer and go through that for His name's sake and for the testimony's sake. That is what He is after. When the writer of Hebrews speaks of enduring, when he is talking about enduring for God's purpose, He is talking about enduring it for the sake of his being conformed to the image of His Son, for the sake of maintaining the testimony, and enduring for the sake of hastening His return. There is always that end in view. There is that fullness of the gospel that He wants to have brought in that we can really partake of in this hour.

The Lord Jesus was the Enduring One

When you think of this matter of abiding under the circumstances, what a picture we have of the life of our Lord Jesus. Every day when He was on this earth, how He endured! He endured His disciples. He endured many various things, and even when He came towards the end of His life, He endured that time in Gethsemane, and during that time at Calvary. All that time He was enduring, there was an abiding within Him. There was that peaceful restfulness of knowing He was accomplishing His Father's will. But because of that joy set before Him, He was able to go through. If we do not know what is set before us, we will not be able to go through. This is how practical God's eternal purpose becomes within our hearts and lives.

As we have the life of the enduring One living within us, we see in this matter of endurance that it has a close friend in the Scriptures. Most of the time when you see endurance, its friend faith will be there also. You will see endurance and faith very much related together because it is by faith in Him that we can endure.

In Hebrews 6 as we read some of the encouragement there, we find a similarity to our theme verses in Hebrew 10.

Hebrew 6:9-11: "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." [He is reminding them just as he did in chapter 10 of how they ministered, how they cared for ones there.] "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end," [And that end is always in

sight there.] “so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Faith and patience in difficult times are working together to allow us to press on. That is one of the places where endurance is translated patience, but we see the relationship there.

The Just shall Live by Faith

In Hebrews 10:39 we see also where he speaks of the “just shall live by faith.”

“We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith.” Through that enduring faith we press on. As the Lord calls us, by faith we yield to Him, and there is an obedience to that faith which allows His life to come forth and be that testimony He is calling us to. This is Paul’s testimony. As he walked by faith, enduring everything that was before him, he was testifying that “it is not I but Christ. It is not my life. I have the life of the enduring One within me that is enabling me to triumph not just somehow but to triumph overwhelmingly.” He overwhelmingly conquered through that life. Praise God, that is what we have within us and that which the Lord is jealous for us to enter into and to experience in these days. During the time of suffering James points out in his letter how the testing of your faith will produce endurance.

As we allow His life to live in us we see how He meets us in a very real and wonderful way. The more that we taste of that enduring life, the more we can enter into knowing what is true spiritual endurance. Spiritual endurance is the enduring One living through us, so that it is not I but Christ. This is how we can press on. This is why when we say we have need, it is need of the life of the enduring One lived out within us. This is endurance.

What is the Purpose of Enduring?

The second question is: What is the purpose of enduring? Do we just go through something for the sake of suffering? We have already read the why about this; we are enduring because we want to please our Father and do the will of God. As we read in Hebrews 10, there is the doing of the will of God, which means we are available in the time and place that we find ourselves in, whether it is at school, work or home. Wherever we are we would be there ready and willing to do the will of God because in that way He is able to do that work of transforming us so that we can receive the promise He has before us, that promise of the millennial kingdom. Praise God, there is a hope set before us and a promise. That is the end we are pressing toward. If we do not see that, there is no way we can press on.

We keep pressing on allowing Him to work in us in such a wonderful way until we hear those glorious words: “The bride has made herself ready.” What a hope

we have set before us! We see how this enduring faith is vitally related to God accomplishing His purpose in this day and time through His people. This is why He has called us together this week. If we are not clear on the why, there is no way we can press on. We will find ourselves shrinking back like these dear ones in this letter.

The Saints Endured by Seeing Him Who was Invisible

After this great word to encourage us to press on, we come to Hebrews 11, the chapter of faith, and see that enduring faith lived out in so many precious and dear ones. But what was the key? How were these dear ones able to press on? That is why we read Hebrews 11:27 about the testimony from the life of Moses. He was able to endure because he saw Him who was invisible. And really that is the testimony of each one there in that chapter. Everyone in chapter 11, whether it was Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, any of them, were able to endure because they saw Him who was invisible, and because of that they were able to press on. They saw Him, and this was the very foundation of entering into that vision of who He was. The eyes of their hearts were opened and that vision of Him governed their life. They saw Him and they were captured.

Sometimes we talk about vision, and we talk about it so much that it becomes common to us, but vision is so vital, so essential. However, vision is not a thing. When we are talking about vision, we are talking about a spiritual encounter with a Person. It is seeing Christ. It is not a vision, it is not a concept; it is seeing Christ. It is spiritual sight, the eyes of our heart being open so that we encounter Him in such a way that we no longer desire to live for ourselves but for Him who loved us and died for us. That is when we see Him. And when Moses saw Him, he was able by faith to continue pressing on. When it speaks of Moses seeing, it is a continual seeing. It was not just a one-time event, but there was a continual seeing Him, a continual pressing on to know Him more and more. He leads us through this situation, through that trial, and as we allow the Lord to meet us, it strengthens our faith. It strengthens His life that is within us. Praise God, we can endure because He has called us according to His purpose. Endurance is with that purpose in view, and if we do not have that purpose in view we will not be able to press on.

The Marriage Covenant

One of the tragedies in the days we are living in is the destruction of family, and how the whole marriage covenant has been watered down so much. Years ago when we talked about a marriage covenant, it was a sacred covenant between a man and a woman that was entered into with a cost and a commitment. There was a bond between them because they knew there was a purpose in view. God has

called us together with a purpose, but sadly today, the whole purpose of marriage has been lost. The reason and the purpose for marriage has been lost, and when purpose is lost, the vision of marriage is lost, and we see it disintegrating. Would that God would recover that amongst us, because tragically within Christianity the simple purpose of marriage has been lost.

When we talk about purpose and vision, it gets very practical in our lives. God has called us because He wants a dwelling place. He wants us not only individually to be conformed to His image, but He is calling us to be those living stones being built together; even built together with those who wear pink shirts, built together with all these who wear different color shirts. We pick on one of the brothers because he wears pink shirts. How would you like to be built together with a brother who is wearing a pink shirt? Well, I do not like pink but here we are together for thirty some years.

Vision is Necessary to be Able to Endure

I was just in San Antonio, and I had to be with a group of brothers from Houston. The only thing the people in Houston could do was beat up on the Yankees, and yet I was supposed to be built together with them and love them. But if you do not see beyond these things, you will never get there because it is the thing that holds us together. If we do not see this vision of what God is calling us to, we will disintegrate and lose the purpose. Instead of being about Him, it becomes about us. And we become an I-centered generation. That is a tragedy. We do not want that.

For many years, when people took pictures, the person taking the picture was not in the picture. What is the most popular picture now? It is the selfie, and that reflects our generation; we are a self-centered lot. We are losing sight of what it is about, and God is calling us afresh to come back to Him. These dear ones to whom the letter of Hebrews was written had at one time been a glorious testimony. Read some of the things they suffered, what they went through, and yet they were beginning to shrink back. They were beginning to deny the faith, and they were running away. The writer had one answer for them: "Come back to that Christ you once knew and loved. Come back to the Lord Jesus Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to do that wonderful work that He has been calling you to.

So we see that the why of enduring is His purpose. He has called us with a purpose. We know that, and that is why we go through. Our Lord Jesus went through that way. The ones who have gone before us went through that way, and that is the way we will go. May the Lord make that fresh to us.

How do We Practically Enter Into Enduring?

The third question is: How do we practically enter into this enduring? The best example is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's look again at Hebrews 12:1-3. One of the reasons I hesitate reading these verses is because there are certain verses in the Scripture that we are so familiar with that they lose their power. They become common to us. And as we read these verses may the Lord refresh them to us in a wonderful way.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy 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 has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

The Great Cloud of Witnesses

"Therefore"—everything that has gone before, not only in Hebrews 11 with that great cloud of witnesses, but all the other things in this letter to the Hebrews that he has shown us of our Lord Jesus Christ. Based upon that, everything he has shown us of Christ as our High Priest, everything that he has shown us of Christ the Apostle, everything that he has shown us of the better ways that He is, we can continue on and be thankful that we have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. I am so thankful for this great cloud of witnesses because these are ones that have gone before us. They have been through things that we have been through. They been through similar things, and they understand. They came to that point of seeing the all-sufficiency of our Jesus Christ. They also came to the place of seeing that they were not sufficient in themselves, but that there is One who is all-sufficient. I am so thankful that they are called witnesses because so often we can get a wrong impression. These are witnesses for us, and they are testifying. They laid their lives down. They are not there as judges. We are not surrounded by a great cloud of judges, nor a great cloud of critics, nor a great cloud of connoisseurs who are sitting up there judging us, evaluating us, critiquing us. "Oh, you did not do that right. You did not do this or this." No, they have experienced what we have been through as our Lord did, and they are cheering us on.

I do not know if you ever played a sporting event in an empty stadium. It is one of the worst things you will ever encounter sport wise. It is amazing how if you just have a few people in the stands, it can make a difference. It is just that encouragement that you get from one another. And these ones are calling back to

us and saying, "The Lord is faithful; He met us in this situation and He is calling us to press on. What a witness we have with them. They are so much for us.

Lay Aside Every Encumbrance and Sin

The writer gives us two simple pieces of advice. He does not give us a theological discussion. He does not get into new teaching or anything. He just gives us two little pieces of advice. He says, "Lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that entangles you." That sounds pretty simple, but it gets quite complicated once it starts impacting our lives. Lay aside all those unnecessary things that entangle us. These can even be religious things, religious habits, the customs and traditions of men that we allow to come in. We need to put all of that aside; return to that place of simplicity and purity of devotion to Him.

When I was in college, I was on the track and field team. You can see that I was not a runner, but I threw the shot, discus, and javelin. When you are warming up, you have warm-up clothes on. At some of the preliminary rounds depending on the competition, you could keep your jacket on but not your sweat pants. Once you got to the finals where everything was real, there were no warm-up clothes left on; there were no watches left on. Everything you could get rid of you let go. You did not want anything to encumber you as you went through.

So as we go through life, we find things that encumber us. Today, everyone likes to pick on the cell phones and other electronic devices. I am thankful for them, but if we are honest, at times they encumber us. It is amazing how we can be so focused on something, really having a precious time with the Lord, having sweet fellowship with a brother or sister and all of a sudden one little beep and your mind is switched to something else. So we find that these things can be an encumbrance. Again, I love my cell phone; I use it too much, and thankfully I have a good wife who helps me get unencumbered.

We see how these things can encumber us. That which is good sometimes can be the enemy of the better. The Lord wants us to be free, and if we are honest within our hearts, if we really go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I really want You to shine Your light within my heart." What are the things in my life that I am too occupied with? Maybe I am too occupied with the Yankees or sports, or cooking, or scrapbooking, whatever the thing might be. Are these thing encumbering us? So often the things that encumber us are not necessarily the bad things of life. But the proportion of time that we are spending on them is a little out of balance. They are taking a disproportion of our time and we are not able to have that precious time with the Lord. And that is where the Holy Spirit can show us and teach us.

He also says, "Get rid of that sin that is encumbering you." That sin as we see throughout Hebrews is the sin of unbelief. The Lord is encouraging us in faith to walk on, and unbelief is the enemy of faith. But we are thankful that as we allow these ones to encourage us and the Holy Spirit to search our hearts, we can be those who are pressing on; we can be those who are encouraged to really allow the Spirit to keep us running in the race.

Running in a Race Calls for Endurance

I was talking with someone this week and they said, "Mac, the very issue of running in the race means you have need of endurance. If you are not in the race you do not have much need for endurance. But the very fact that we are running in this race, we have need of endurance and we need to recognize it. We have need of Him. Remember that endurance is not us; it is Christ. We have need of His life within us and we do that by "fixing our eyes upon Him," allowing the eyes of our heart to be so fixed upon Him in such a wonderful way that other things will pale in remembrance of Him.

May we see Him as the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. Faith originates with Him; therefore He is our faith, and He perfects it. He brings it to a fullness and we see the fullness of His life in a fuller and greater measure and we have that end in view. It always comes back to having the end and the goal in view.

That is how our Lord endured. He endured because He saw the joy set before Him. He endured the agony of the cross. He endured all the pain and all of the shame. He was able to endure and overcome because He had God's purpose in His heart, and He was able to press on.

Seeing Christ in a Fuller and Greater Way

For these many years as we have gathered for this conference, the Lord has brought before us over and over again this matter of God's eternal purpose, and it all comes back to seeing Christ in a fuller and greater way. And this is what He is jealous for this week. He wants us to be those who are considering Him. It is a coming back in a fresh way, setting apart the things of this world, turning our eyes back to Him, considering Him, constantly being fixed upon Him, being reminded of who He is, reminded of all that He has done, reminded of how He has endured all the hostility against Himself, and we can sit here as privileged ones tonight and through this week to sit at His feet and say, "Speak, Lord, Thy servants are listening. This is what He is calling us to. As we continue on we are thankful for how He has endured; He is the One who has overcome.

I have one comment on chapter 12:3: If we fix our eyes on Him we do not grow weary and lose heart or cause our souls to faint. If our eyes are not fixed on Him,

there is a weariness that sets in, there is a fainting of our soul; it is overwhelming. The fainting of our soul will actually at times feel physical as things begin to overwhelm us, but as we fix our eyes on Him, there is a refreshing that comes in and lifts that weight off and allows us to press on.

We are not those who shrink back to destruction (see Hebrews 10:39), but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Praise God, our Lord is here! He does not want our souls to faint, but He wants our souls to be preserved. What is that saying? He is in this for the salvation of our souls. He wants us to be transformed and conformed to the image of His Son and prepared for His soon return.

Our Lord Jesus is Jealous for the Bride to be made Ready

As we begin this week, we want to reflect. We want to stop and really consider this theme—"You have need of endurance." Or the other theme: "You have need of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is our need for the day and hour that we are living in, and may He find ones that can be encouraged. May we really find an abundance in Him because, praise God, He is our endurance; He is our faith, and He is our life. It is in Him that we find our fullness and our ability to press on in this hour. This is not the time for us to be shrinking back. This is the time for us to be finding Him in a fresh way as we press on and allow Him to work within us in such a way that there will be a testimony for the Lord in this generation that will hasten His return. May it be that He can do that work in this hour to prepare us and build us together because He is so jealous for the bride to be made ready. If we do not know about this bride, if we do not know about His purpose, if we do not know about the eternal companion for the Son, we will shrink back; it will not be worth it to us to go on. But praise God, He has revealed Himself to us. He has made the fullness of His heart open to us through His Word and we are thankful that when we find our all in all in Him, we can be those in a fresh way who surrender to Him.

We begin tonight by surrendering ourselves to Him, that He would have a great freedom and a great liberty within each one of us to prepare us for the days that are ahead. He has a unique and specific way that He is working within each of us. We are all different; we are all unique. Praise God for that! And as we are yoked with Him He has a specific way in which He is working in you and in me to prepare us for His soon return. And we want to be those who are surrendered to Him, cooperating with Him and hastening that day. May we be found as such.

Let's pray:

Lord, we are thankful that You have called us with such a great calling. We are thankful You have revealed Your Son to us. We all confess tonight that we see in

part. You have revealed Your Son to us, and there are parts of Him we see, but we know there is still so much of Him You want to show us. And as we are here during this time this week, we want to be those who are found cooperating with You. Lord, keep us from distractions; keep us from anything that would try to steal the Word of God from our hearts. Lord, with this word tonight, and the word that is shared this week, would You, as the great Maestro, weave a beautiful song of faith in all our hearts that we sang of earlier, and through that song of faith we can press on to the fullness of what You are calling us to. In Thy name we pray. Amen.