



Countryside Women's Ministry Newsletter



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Endurance Training

By Sheila Pennington

I've been thinking a lot about spiritual endurance lately. At times I've felt myself getting weary, and I know I need endurance to respond correctly to ongoing trials. We will all have difficulties as long as we live on earth. It will be a rare moment when everything is going our way. I've noticed something about myself when I'm going through hard times, and maybe it's true about you, too—I sometimes find that I've put "expiration dates" on my trials. Even when I'm handling a difficult situation fairly well for a time, if that situation lingers and my patience is stretched I am tempted to give in to sinful thoughts, attitudes, and actions—even if they're the very ones I've been fighting (for a time) *not* to give in to! I sometimes justify my sin simply because I think I've handled things well enough for long enough.

But the reality is that I need endurance to obey no matter how long our Father allows a trial to last. I want to live for the Lord over the long haul. I want to handle the circumstances He brings in God-honoring ways for as long as He brings them.

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Athletes understand the need for training in endurance. I've been reading about people around the world who are training at home during the physical distancing orders. Even though they have not been allowed to leave their small apartments or homes, many have shown great creativity in coming up with ways to continue training. People are running marathons on their balconies, in their yards, and even in their rooms! They see the benefits of continuing their training, and in particular endurance training.

We need to see the need for *spiritual* endurance, and actively pursue it!

What is endurance?

First, we must understand what endurance is. It is the ability to bear up under a load or great pressure, like a weightlifter bears up under a heavy load. He struggles and strains with all his energy as he lifts a large weight, keeping it up off the ground for the allotted time. Steadfastness, patience, fortitude, and perseverance are other words used to describe this quality.

In the same way that someone who has physical endurance doesn't tucker out after the first lap (to switch metaphors), the person who has spiritual endurance doesn't give up or give in to sin as a trial goes on. He continues to bear up under the trial, responding to it in God-honoring ways.

How do we get endurance?

Throughout Scripture we learn God uses trials to produce endurance. These trials are also referred to as *tests*, *tribulations*, and *temptations*.



James 1:2 says, “The testing of your faith produces endurance.” Romans 5:3 puts it this way: “Tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character.”

Just like a runner builds his endurance by running longer distances and a weightlifter builds his strength by lifting heavier weights, we build spiritual endurance by “lifting” the heavy load of trials. This process requires hard work and is often uncomfortable. God uses trials to produce endurance as He builds up our spiritual strength.

But simply gritting our teeth and *surviving* a trial isn’t enough: trials don’t *automatically* produce endurance and proven character. In fact, every trial, trouble, or difficulty is not only a trial, but also a test! Every trial places us at a crossroads and we must choose either to trust and obey God or to doubt and disobey Him. God produces endurance in us as we obey Him and His Word in the trials we encounter.

We’ve seen this in our own lives. We can look back and see times when we faced a trail and, by God’s help, chose to obey. One test that God brought into my life was a time when I faced significant health problems and was unable to carry out any of my normal activities. That season lasted way beyond what I thought I could handle. And yet today I can see that God used that extended trial to build my endurance and to change me.

Where does endurance come from?

The runner or the weightlifter may not know his physical limits. But we know that the Lord will allow us to face only the load that He Himself will help us bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says it this way, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful,

who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

So what is this way of escape? How does He actually give us this strength? We often face trials we do not feel we have the strength to bear. And we’re right! *We don’t! We need God’s strength.*

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul was facing a huge trial. We’re not told exactly what the trial was, but he calls it “a thorn in the flesh” and he wanted it to go away. In fact, he repeatedly “implored” (a pretty strong word meaning “to call for help”) the Lord to remove it.

But God didn’t remove it. Instead God said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Paul then responds, “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Wait. What? I thought we were talking about getting stronger, not weaker! Like so much in the Christian life, God’s ways are often the opposite of what we, in our human wisdom, expect. He works in paradoxes. The way up is down. The last shall be first. The weak will be strong.

Did you notice how comprehensive Paul’s list of trials is? Weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties. I don’t see much wiggle room there. No omissions. Again, typically Paul, it’s all covered. In *every* trial we can be content like Paul; and we can have power, *Christ’s power*, to face that trial. Acknowledging our own inability and weakness, we must cling to Him and His strength.

What about when we simply don't know how to handle a trial? When we don't know which way to turn? James 1:5 tells us we need to ask God for wisdom, and He promises to give it. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." The next verses warn us that we must ask for this wisdom trusting completely in God, without faltering in our confidence in Him.

What are its benefits?

Trials then, rightly handled, produce endurance—that tenacious ability to withstand pressure. But what are the results of having endurance? The benefits are immense. James 1:4 puts it this way: "Let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect [mature] and complete [whole], lacking in nothing."

Romans 5, another text that deals with endurance (here called "perseverance"), states, "Tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5). God uses endurance to produce spiritual maturity, strength of character, and unshakeable hope.

So *that's* how I can endure trials with joy and obedience—because God is working in me to produce all kinds of good things. Romans 5:3 says, "We exult in our tribulations." James 1:2-3 states it this way: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials."

With God's help we can pursue spiritual endurance and seek His strength to obey, no matter how difficult or lengthy the trial.

Will you join me in endurance training? Let's remember:

- Trials test our faith (James 1:3).
- Testing our faith produces endurance, proven character, and hope, because it proves we are loved of God (Romans 5:3-5).
- The end result is that we will be perfect (or mature) and complete (James 1:4).
- We are to view trials with joy because of what God is doing through them, to seek God's wisdom in navigating them, and to rely on Christ for the strength to endure them. (James 1:2-5; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).



Finding Joy

By Sarah Dees

Those of us who grew up in the church probably learned about joy at a young age. After all, we had the “joy, joy, joy, joy, down in our hearts!” We were taught that “happiness” is based on getting our way, while “joy” is a lasting satisfaction found in God, not in the stuff we want. While that definition is absolutely true, we don't have to be very old before the trials of life bring up some questions about what joy really looks like. The Bible commands us to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:1), but does that mean we aren't supposed to feel sad? Does it mean that we should have joyful emotions all the time? How can we obey the command to rejoice in the Lord, especially when life is hard?

Thankfully, joy is not something that we have to muster up on our own. It's really not about our willpower, our positive thinking, or our manipulation of our circumstances to get things to turn out how we'd like them to. Joy must also not be confused with a state of perpetual

(and possibly false) happiness in which we repeat a trite sentiment to counter every trial. Instead of trying to just “feel” joyful, we are to heed the Bible’s instruction to develop the vital heart habits of trust, thankfulness, and thinking on God’s character. Training our minds in this way will result in a deep joy springing not from the fulfillment of our own desires, but from a love for God and an unwavering confidence in His perfect wisdom and goodness, which far exceed our own.

Trust in God is deeply connected to joy.

We often think (whether we admit it or not!) that if life goes the way we’d like it to, we’ll be happy. Even though scripture is clear about God’s complete sovereignty and His absolute goodness and wisdom, it is a common human temptation to doubt that our circumstances will truly turn out for the best, or to focus on the ways in which they are already lacking. And truly, life can be hard! We are faced with financial pressures, health concerns, wayward children, and a myriad of circumstances that are too much to bear in our own strength.

There are many places in scripture that demonstrate the wisdom of trusting God, but the psalms say it so clearly and so beautifully.

Consider Psalm 28:6-7:

*“Blessed be the LORD,
Because He has heard the voice of my supplication.
7 The LORD is my strength and my shield;
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart exults,
And with my song I shall thank Him.”*



What is the result of choosing to trust in God? It’s a heart that exults, a heart that joyfully proclaims God’s goodness. Our hearts are helped by remembering that the Lord hears and acts on our behalf.

Another beautiful example of trust leading to joy is found at the end of Psalm 33.

Psalm 33:18-21

Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,

On those who hope for His lovingkindness,

¹⁹ To deliver their souls from death

And to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD;

He is our help and our shield.

²¹ For our heart rejoices in Him,

Because we trust in His holy name.



Imagine for a moment that your car has broken down, and you are stranded by the side of the road. Would you invite your four-year-old child to come look under the hood and provide a solution? As silly as it sounds to have a child fix the car, we often have an inflated view of our own knowledge and ability. We sometimes think that we have answers to complex problems, when the reality is that our knowledge is so limited. There are certainly times to be responsible and to act, and then there are times to simply trust and rest. When we find ourselves mentally spinning our wheels on problems we can't control, fearing the future, or focusing on the unpleasant aspects of our current situation, then it's time to compose and quiet our soul, as Psalm 131 (another fabulous psalm about trust) teaches us, and to trust in God as a weaned child rests against his mother. Quiet trust in our Lord, who has every detail under His control, will lead to rest and joy.

Thankfulness to God brings joy.

What is the opposite of joy? Discontentment, grumbling, self-pity... there are so many! Just after his admonition to "rejoice in the Lord

always,” Paul instructs us in Philippians 4:6-7 not to be anxious about our trials, but to make our requests known to God *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 also links the commands to rejoice, pray, and be thankful, all in one sentence.

Giving thanks is an exercise that keeps our requests in proper perspective and recognizes God as our faithful provider. We must always be thankful for the things God has given, and the way He is working. We can be thankful that God allows trials into our lives, and that He cares for us and matures us through them.

When you find yourself discouraged or in despair, it’s the perfect time to stop and list the many things that you can thank God for. Physically writing them down can be such a help. Another practical way to cultivate thankfulness is to exchange “have to” for “get to” as you think about your circumstances. I don’t have a whole list of things I “have to” do, I “get to” do them! We “get to” help children get ready for bed, make laundry clean again, get on a conference call for work, care for a family member, and so much more. Our list of complaints can turn to a list of thanksgivings as we realize that we have employment, machines to help us with our tasks, access to food that needs to be cooked, and people in our lives to care for. It’s a joy to do these things when we realize that we “get to!”

Thinking on truth about God results in joy.

Rehearsing truth about God and His character also reorients our minds and leads to great joy. Psalm 100 is such a beautiful expression of trust, thankfulness, and the joy that comes as the result of meditating on truth about God.

*“Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
3 Know that the LORD Himself is God.
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”*

The word that is translated “gladness” appears in several other places in the Old Testament. One of those places is in Deuteronomy 28:47 where the Israelites were told that failing to “*serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things,*” would result in severe discipline, including serving their enemies. Ouch. Psalm 100 is so beautiful to our ears, but serving the Lord with gladness is not merely a suggestion!

Rather, the words in Psalm 100 beautifully reflect a heart of willing submission to God. Instead of sitting in disapproval of God’s handling of his circumstances, the psalmist is joyfully humble and submissive. He reminds us that we are the sheep, not the Shepherd. We are the created, not the Creator.

As I’ve observed my own life, I’ve found that my lack of joy often comes down to a failure to serve the Lord with gladness. I’m not joyful about the current task or assignment because I simply don’t want to do it! And this is such foolishness when I stop to think about it. When I contemplate Christ, who came to serve, not to be served, and then died a terrible death on the cross for my sin, I see the utter ridiculousness of my discontentment over what are often trivial inconveniences.

The psalmist continues,
*4 “Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.*

*⁵ For the LORD is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations.”*

It is interesting to note that proclamations of joyful praise in the psalms are often followed by a rehearsal of God’s good character and His great deeds. This is true in Psalm 100, and Psalm 95 provides another great example.

In the times when we can’t see how all the details are working together, we can console our hearts with who He is. Joy does not mean an absence of sorrow or grief. Many of us are grieving various losses because of this pandemic season. However, we can grieve, and yet also be joyful. We feel the pain of events cancelled, future plans uncertain, distance from family and friends, loss of togetherness, and financial calamity, but we can also choose to be joyful, thanking Him that He is good and that His steadfast love and faithfulness toward us will never end.

In this season of great unrest and uncertainty, let’s choose to trust, to be thankful, and to fix our minds on who God is. Let us rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I will say REJOICE!



Let’s run the race with endurance!

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, 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.

³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary [\[c\]](#) and lose heart.

Trusting God in Trials Throughout Church History

Compiled by Sarah Ramos

God's people have been persevering through diverse trials since sin entered the world. It can be so helpful to hear how other believers in other places and other periods of history have taught their own hearts to worship, trust, and obey God even through incredibly difficult circumstances. While we may not agree with everything these authors have written, and only God's Word is inerrant and authoritative, we hope that a glimpse at the thoughts of these fellow humans will encourage you today!

“This is indeed an excellent art, to be able to draw from God what one had before in the creature [any created thing]. Christian, how did you enjoy comfort before? Was the creature anything to you but a conduit, a pipe, that conveyed God's goodness to you? ‘The pipe is cut off,’ says God, ‘come to me, the fountain, and drink immediately.’” - Jeremiah Burroughs, English non-conformist pastor who fled to Holland because of religious persecution, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (1648)



“Does God perform all things for His people? Do not distrust Him then when new or great difficulties arise. Why should you think that He that has done so many things for you will now do no more?” - John Flavel, British non-conformist pastor, *The Mystery of Providence* (1678)

“We are only scholars. It rests with the Great Teacher to decide which lesson shall come next – a hard one or an easy one.” - William Ward (1769-1823), missionary to India, co-worker of William Carey. Letter quoted in *William Carey* by S. Pearce Carey (1923)

“It is the very time for faith to work, when sight ceases. The greater the difficulties, the easier for faith. As long as there remain certain natural prospects, faith does not get on even as easily (if I may say so), as when all natural prospects fail.” - George Müller (1805-1898), British evangelist and orphanage director. Quoted from his journal in *Faith in God as to Temporal Things* (1855)

“From prayer that asks that I may be
Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,
From fearing when I should aspire,
From faltering when I should climb higher—
From silken self, O Captain, free
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.”

- Amy Carmichael, missionary to India (1867-1951), “Flame of God”



“Peace I leave with you; I do not give to you as the world gives’ (John 14:27, NEB). What sort of peace has He to give us? A peace which was constant in the midst of ceaseless work (with few visible results), frequent interruptions, impatient demands, few physical comforts, a peace which was not destroyed by the arguments, the faithlessness, and hatred of the people. Jesus had perfect confidence in His Father, whose will He had come to accomplish. Nothing touched Him without His Father’s permission. Nothing touches me without my Father’s permission.” - Elisabeth Elliot, missionary and author. “Waiting”, in *Keep a Quiet Heart* (1995)



-“There is no way to peace along the way of safety...Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God’s commandment, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of Almighty God...” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German clergyman jailed and executed for involvement in plot against Hitler, “Address at Fanø conference” (1934)

“Father sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. ‘Corrie,’ he began gently, ‘when you and I go to Amsterdam – when do I give you your ticket?’

I sniffed a few times, considering this.

‘Why, just before we get on the train.’

‘Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we’re going to need things, too. Don’t run out ahead of Him, Corrie.’” -Corrie Ten Boom, Dutch resistance worker during World War II, *The Hiding Place* (1971)

[On why we are weary in well-doing] “If we are working to satisfy and please self in any shape or form, the end is always going to be weariness and tiredness...You are tired and weary and you feel at times it is too much for you? Go back and look at your life and put it in the context of eternity. Stop and ask yourself what it all means. It is nothing but a preparatory school. This life is but the ante-chamber of eternity...” - Martin Lloyd-Jones, British pastor, *Spiritual Depression* (1965)

“It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.” - CS Lewis, British author and apologist, *Mere Christianity* (1952)

Events and Announcements

Be sure to join the [Countryside Bible Church Women Facebook group](#) if you haven’t already!

This coming fall is a great time to join **Ladies Bible Study** or a **Titus 2 group**. This fall, the Ladies Bible Study will be studying *Ephesians: Saved by Grace through Faith for Good Works* by Compass Bible Church, Aliso Viejo, CA.

Titus 2 groups will be reading *Envy of Eve: Finding Contentment in a Covetous World* by Melissa Kruger.