

STAYING POWER



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STAYING POWER

by Ronald L. Dart

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What do you do when you have already done all you can? You are in trouble and there is no way out. You are sick, and the doctors have done all they can. You are persecuted and there is no relief. You have made every effort, tried every option, and still see no way out. The matter is out of your hands. What do you do now?

The question seems contradictory. After all, if you have done all you can do, then there is nothing left to do, is there? Well, there is the old saying, "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on." If that doesn't seem very helpful, think about this:

When Jesus' disciples asked Him about the end of the world, He warned them that things would get out of control. Nation would rise against nation, there would be earthquakes, famines, wars, persecutions. Brother would betray brother. He said, and many faithful people would lose their lives. All of this warns of a time when things will be completely beyond our control.

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Then, when He had told them all these things, He told them the most important thing of all. He said this:

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24:13).

So you have done all that you can. You have met your problems head on, you have fought against the devil to the end of your strength, and you seem to have lost. Your life is no longer in your own hands, and your hands are tied. The devil's minions have put you in jail, slammed and bolted the door, and have thrown away the key. Your life is out of your hands now.

Well, not quite. There is still one more thing you can do—you can *endure*. That which endures, lasts. It has staying power. It does not quit or give up—even when *defeated*. Those who are going to be saved, then, must have *staying power*.

There are people who win, not because they are bigger, better, or smarter, but because they have one thing their opponent does not. Call it grit, determination, or even stubbornness, but they simply outlast their enemy.

It is strange, when you think about it, that the Christian life should be hard. Life is hard enough, but being a true Christian in any age makes it even harder. Besides the knocks, bruises and frustrations of ordinary life, the Christian has faced persecution, loss of family and friends, and sometimes imprisonment and death because of his faith.

There is no escaping the hardness of life. God has decided that we should endure it. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Therefore, *endure hardness*, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2:3). The military metaphor is fitting, because no one goes through more pointless misery than a soldier in training or in war—at least it seems pointless to him.

And like a soldier, there are times when those who would keep the faith have nothing left to do except to hold out. They know they will not be comfortable. Circumstances are going to be hard—even miserable. But while they cannot end their troubles, there is one thing they can do—they can last.

Endurance is a part of life. There are some things that can never come your way unless you are able to endure. All my life, I had read about sailing. I had read fiction and fact, and was enamored of the idea of crossing the ocean in a craft powered only by the wind. A few years ago, a good friend invited me to sail back from Mexico with him. He was sailing down with a racing crew, and I could join him for the trip back.

I had read enough about sailing to get beyond the romance. Sailing is not a comfortable sport. There are times when everything is wet with no way to get it dry. The boat is constantly in motion—sometimes violently so. It is not unusual to come back from a passage with bruises and abrasions. And this trip would be hot. The voyage would leave the Yucatan peninsula in July, and sailboats are not air conditioned. The trip would take about five days.

But I wanted the experience, and there was no way to get it without enduring some mild hardship, and facing up to a small fear of the unknown. And once at sea, there was nothing to do but endure. It was either that or jump overboard.

I never hesitated. I had wanted this trip so long that the possible miseries seemed insignificant. I went. It was glorious.

On the other hand, the apostle Paul had some experiences at sea that give new meaning the word "endure." From prison, he wrote to Timothy: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier....Remember

profit, but to the subverting of the hearers (II Timothy 2:10-14).

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that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds.”

No, it was not merely jail. Paul was taken to prison where they clamped bracelets around his ankles and wrists. A group of soldiers muscled him aboard a ship, cast off and set sail for Rome. It was in the fall of the year, a stormy time at sea. It is one thing to be a free man on a ship in a storm. It is another to be a prisoner in chains, locked in the wet and leaky hold of the ship. If the ship goes down, you drown with the rats.

But what could he do? He had little choice. So, he continued in his letter to Timothy, saying that he had suffered trouble even to being bound, but adding, “But the word of God is not bound. Therefore I *endure* all things” (II Timothy 2:4-10).

Even in chains, Paul still had a choice. He could allow himself to be defeated, or he could hang on. He could be passive and fatalistic, or he could be active and positive. He made a deliberate decision to *endure*, and in the process, kept the Word of God alive and working.

So many times, we think we are helpless. We think there is nothing we can do, so we stop trying. We become passive. But endurance is not passive. Endurance requires a conscious decision, and has a goal in mind. Paul certainly did:

Therefore I *endure all things* for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no

Paul did what he did for the sake of “the elect,” that they might achieve salvation. If he gave up, many of them would give up. He also saw suffering as an essential part of the Christian witness. For Paul, it was not merely a matter of suffering, but of suffering “with Him.” It was not merely a matter of being dead, but of being dead “with Him.” Giving up in the face of pain, suffering, even death, was unthinkable to Paul. It would mean denying Christ. Knowing all this, Paul had little patience with cute doctrinal arguments that depended on words and lexicons.

Enduring is first a frame of mind. Paul was in chains for a reason. He stood for something. He *needed* to wear the chains. The very fact that he was wearing the chains made a statement, and he was glad to make the statement. Because of his attitude, his captors could see it in his eyes. It was in his voice. He would not be dragged in with his head down and defeat written all over him. He would go before his judges with his head up and the realization that he was there for the defense of the gospel.

One man, whom Jesus had called to follow Him, said, “Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” Jesus responded, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:61,62). What Jesus means is that once you have put your hand to the plow, once you have set out to follow Him, *quitting is no longer an option*.

You may be in someone else’s power. Events may be entirely out of your control. You may have done everything anyone could possibly expect you to do. But you are still not finished. You still have to last. If you are a martyr, you must

play the role to the end. You must act like you are not afraid, even when you are.

There is a funny thing about the decision to endure. It seems to impart a courage of its own. You may start out acting like you are not afraid, and in the end, surprise yourself when you notice that you truly are not afraid.

The last thing a martyr has to endure is death. And if the last fight available to him is to look his captors in the eye as they take his life, then that is what he must do. He must not cringe, weep, or beg. This is the final test of endurance.

Are you dying of cancer? Suicide is not an option. To endure the pain with faith and courage is to suffer with Christ—to be an example to all those who bear with you through the trial. Christ would have little in common with Dr. Kevorkian, and Paul would not have understood him at all.

Consider what Paul had to say to the Thessalonians. Here was a church which had suffered no small degree of persecution since Paul had left them. Several had even died for the faith. When he learned what they had been through, Paul wrote:

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet [fitting] because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations *that ye endure* (II Thessalonians 1:3-4).

This is a commendation for endurance, and specifies two elements of staying power: patience and faith. The Thessalonians had settled into a routine they knew they had to live with. They did not quit. They stepped up to the

challenge and did what they had to do. In the process, they made a statement. Paul described it as “a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (verse 5).

None of this was without purpose. They were suffering for the Kingdom of God. Their endurance was a “manifest token” of the judgment of God. Something that is manifest is something made plain to see. A token is something taken as evidence or proof.

In a sense, our endurance in the face of trials, persecution, loss, heartache, even death, is a piece of evidence that God can take into court. Strange as it sounds, something like that actually did happen.

There was a day when all the sons of God came to appear before Him and Satan also came among them (Job 1:6). God asked Satan where he had been, and the devil replied, “Oh going to and fro in the earth, walking up and down in it.”

“Ah,” replied God, “Have you seen my servant Job, there is not a man like him, not a one that loves good and hates evil.” When God made this innocent sounding remark, He effectively took poor Job and shoved him out on a green tablecloth like a poker chip.

“Sure, I’ve seen him,” the devil came back, “Does Job serve you for nothing. I can’t touch him. You have made him rich. You protect him. Everything is going his way. Anybody would serve you for that. Job is just another of your paid help.”

“You think so?” God said, “I will place everything he has in your hands, but you may not touch his body.”

“You have a bet,” replied Satan, and left. What then happened to Job is hard to understand. He lost everything, houses, land, cattle. Finally all his children died in a catastrophe. Satan left Job a broken man.

But in spite of it all, Job did not blame God. His reply? "God has given, God has taken away, Blessed be His name."

When Satan next came before God, he had to face the fact that he had lost the bet. God immediately pointed to Job. Once again He credited him as an upright man and added "and still he holds fast his integrity although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause." God was not beyond rubbing it in.

"Double or nothing," Satan replied; "Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has will he give for his life; but put forth your hand now and touch his flesh and his bone, and he will curse you to your face" (Job 2:5).

"Very well," God answered; "He is in your hand; but save his life."

"Done!" said the devil. So he went out and smote Job with boils from head to toe.

The story of Job is a long story, and a fascinating one in spite of being a rather tedious read at times. One of the greatest lessons of the book is that the suffering of a servant of God is never without meaning or purpose. Job had no idea what was going on, but he was convinced that God was in it. And he was right.

Would you be willing to endure pain so God could prove a point? Now it is only fair to add that God was preparing to make a point to Job, but Job did not know that until the very end. In all his agony, he wanted to know why, *but it was not possible for him to know why* until he had *endured* a while.

Job was a good man. He was a righteous man, and he had God's testimony to the fact. The problem was, he knew he was righteous, and had no reluctance in saying so. This was not the kind of man that God finally wanted him to be. Nor did it say anything about his staying power. Satan had unwittingly raised a legitimate question. Will this man hold up under fire? Will he endure when things are going bad for

him? Anybody can endure good times; how can we know what kind of stuff he has until the bad times come?

The devil was quite willing to play the game with God. But he never knew what the real stakes were.

Not many of us, when we are suffering, are able to keep in mind the stakes we are playing for. But you don't have to know them. Job didn't. What you have to know is that you must outlast the trial; you must endure.

For Job, and for most of us, endurance is seen as a passive thing—a non-act. You don't have much choice, you just sit there and passively endure. And yet something very important is going on. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. And *in nothing terrified by your adversaries...* (Philippians 1:27,28).

This is important. God does not want us to be terrified by our adversaries, *or afraid of our trials*. Have you ever considered why a certain class of international criminal is called a "terrorist"? Their goal is to create changes in national policies through the use of fear. If they cannot create fear, then all their effort is in vain.

The devil feeds on fear. There is a mind set of cruelty that loves the smell of fear. There are people who get high on other men's terror. Gangs who roam the streets at night are trying to generate fear in their opponents while they pretend that they are not afraid. Yet if they were not afraid, they would have no need of a gang.

If you can just understand that one of the things your adversary wants is for you to fear, you have gone a long way

toward winning. In Paul's words, you should not be terrified by your adversary. You should at least make every effort not to show fear.

Paul said more: "And in nothing terrified by your adversaries; which is to them an evident token of perdition...." The very fact that you stand up, the very fact that you look them in the eye while you are enduring whatever is coming your way, the very fact that you won't quit, the very fact that you won't hang your head, the very fact that you won't tuck your tail between your legs and run, the very fact that you won't give up, all this is an *evident token of perdition*. Their perdition.

Perdition is defined as a state of final spiritual ruin. The very first way some men will see their own judgment is in the eyes of one they are persecuting.

Paul added one more thought to this: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, *but also to suffer for his sake*" (verse 29). Now there is a new thought. Among all the gifts we receive from God, the one least appreciated is the gift of suffering for His sake. But suffering is part of the package.

It is not as though we were never told. Jesus told his disciples early on:

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake...But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and

the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matthew 10:16-22).

Now it is not reasonable that a leader should ask his people to do something he was not willing to do himself. So when Jesus says to us that we must be prepared to endure persecution, He knew full well that He was going to have to endure it Himself.

On the night before He died, and after the last supper, Jesus took his disciples to the garden called Gethsemane. He asked them to wait for Him while He prayed, saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:36-38). When He was alone, He prayed, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." He prayed this way three times, and on the last occasion He was in such agony that His sweat was like great drops of blood.

There is no need to apologize for tears. There is no reason to feel guilty when we flinch in the face of a trial or a test. It is okay to want a trial to go away. When He knew that His trial would involve torture and death, even Jesus wanted out. But through prayer and tears, He came to want His Father's will even more.

So when we face a trial, it is not wrong for us to pray that God would take it away. Jesus did. But as He prayed, He experienced a change of heart. First He prayed, "Let this cup pass from me." Later, He asked, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Finally, His prayer was, "If it is not possible that this cup pass, thy will be done."

Like Jesus, we have sometimes to grow into an awareness of what we must endure. The beauty of relating to God as a Father is that we can come to Him as often and as long as we like. It is in this persistent coming to God in prayer that we

slowly begin to understand what we must endure, and why we must endure it. The things we have to endure have meaning and purpose, *but only if we endure to the end.*

When you are in a time of trial and are not getting the support you need, it is tempting to blame your friends. Jesus chided His disciples because they kept falling asleep. Yet He knew that “the spirit was willing”—His disciples wanted to support Him, but they just did not know what to do or how to do it. And there is a point where your friends can’t help you, no matter how hard they try. There is no use in blaming them because they don’t feel what you feel. They cannot. Enduring is something you have to do alone.

An important thing to know about all this is that Jesus had a way out of it. “I could pray the Father,” He said, “and He would send legions of angels.” Deliverance was a prayer away. And yet that prayer was never made. Why? Because if He had done so, He would have failed to *endure to the end.* God’s purpose in the trial would not have been served, and the Scriptures would have remained unfulfilled.

None of this is to suggest that if you have a way out of your suffering that you should not take it. But what is the price you have to pay to get out? What is it that you are trying to avoid? What compromise will you have to make? There is a time when you have to decide to endure, to suffer through, to stick it out, *even when there might be a way out.* You don’t compromise with what is right in order to end a trial.

It is as simple as that. Enduring sometimes requires you to make a positive decision not to give up, but to bear up—even when you have a way out.

When the mob came for Jesus, all the disciples forsook Him and fled. How would it feel to have all your friends run off and leave you? When it happened to Jesus, He had no choice in the matter. All He could do was endure the

abandonment. He could not even cry about it. He could not let others see His disappointment. All He could do was watch them go and feel sorry for them. He knew how rotten they would feel when it was all over.

The chief priests and elders had prepared thoroughly for this moment. The most difficult job they had was finding witnesses to testify against Jesus. The man had done nothing wrong. But finally, they came up with a couple of liars who would say what they wanted them to say.

After the false testimony, they asked Jesus: “Do you have no answer? What is the truth about what these say against you?” He answered them not a word. He was not there to defend Himself. He was there to endure whatever they did to Him. Regardless of what they said, regardless of the lies and the humiliation, He had to endure it to the bitter end.

Finally the high priest commanded Him, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Now Jesus had to answer. This adjuration or command came from the law of God. Once this command is given, any witness who keeps silent about what he knows is guilty of perjury (Leviticus 5:1). So when the high priest, speaking with his authority as judge, commanded Jesus to speak, He had no choice but to tell them the truth.

There was no way to answer this without making things worse, but there was no hesitation. Jesus did not even hedge, but answered the question more fully than it was asked. “Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Jesus not only admitted the truth, He expressed it in provocative terms. He ensured that He would go through the entire trial. When the priest heard what Jesus said, he rent his clothes saying, “He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now we have heard His

blasphemy. What think ye?" And the mob answered "He is guilty of death." Then they spit in His face, made fun of Him, and slapped Him repeatedly.

At this point, events were out of control. Jesus was in their power. Apart from calling on God to send an army of angels, there was nothing Jesus could do. Or was there? In fact, there was one more thing He could do—He could *endure*. He could stand up like a man and look them in the eye. He could refuse to give them any satisfaction. He could refuse to crawl or to beg.

None of us have had to endure anything like this. For us, it is hard enough to endure the small things. There have been too many times when we have come to the end of our rope and just let it go. When Jesus' disciples got to the end of the rope, they dropped it and ran. One of the things we have to learn in this life is how to do better than that.

But for us to learn better, we need more than one chance. While Jesus was on trial and being tormented, Peter was sitting outside. A young lady stepped over to him and said, "You were one of those with Jesus of Galilee, weren't you?" And there, in front of everyone, Peter denied ever having known Jesus.

It is good that this failure is on record. Otherwise, we might not know that we can still have Christ's love, compassion and mercy even after we have failed miserably. Peter knew better. Jesus had even told him that he would deny Him, and Peter still folded under pressure.

After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" That had to hurt. Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Later, Jesus asked him again, "Simon, are you *sure* you love me." In the years that were to come, Peter had to reflect again and again over that question. He knew he had denied Jesus three times, and yet Christ still told him, "Feed my

sheep."

Peter was right when he said that Jesus already knew that he loved Him. The questions were not for Jesus' sake, but for Peter's. Just as Peter had denied Christ three times, Jesus wanted three affirmations. He wanted him to say the words out loud. Peter would have to face death for Christ, and it was important that he be strengthened.

There are times in our lives when God, in one way or another, puts the question to us: "Do you love me?" He forces us to say it, either with words or with actions: "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." It is true that He knows, but in forcing you to say it, He strengthens your resolve.

I have been called for jury duty on several occasions (although never selected). In the process called *voire dire*, the attorneys question the prospective jurors thoroughly about their experiences and their prejudices. Then, they ask them if, in spite of what they have read and heard, in spite of any personal feeling, they can be impartial and can base their decision solely on the evidence presented in court. At first I wondered why they were doing all this—after all, the person could lie about it. Then it dawned on me. That affirmation in open court would make it much harder to do something different in the jury room.

Where are your affirmations coming from? In what ways are you affirming Christ in your life? When the real tribulations come our way, we need to have affirmed before that we will remain faithful. There needs to be a time when we say like Peter, yes, I do love you; yes, I will do it. It is not enough to say those things in private. We must say these things in front of the world, and not merely with words. Your life should affirm your love for God.

In the end, Jesus had to face Pontius Pilate. The governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews." Jesus only

answer was, "You say it." Pilate pressed Him: "Don't you hear how many things they accuse you of?" Pilate was astonished when Jesus did not answer. "Man, don't you understand what is happening here?" Pilate asked. "I have the power to release you or condemn you."

"You would have no power," Jesus replied, "except it was given to you by my Father who is in heaven." Jesus was determined to endure what He had to endure—to stick it out to the bitter end.

Then Pilate released Barabbas to the crowd and delivered Jesus to be scourged and crucified. The common soldiers stripped Jesus of his clothes, stood Him naked in front of the whole band of soldiers, and whipped Him. When they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and placed a reed in His right hand. They bowed the knee before Him, and made fun of Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then they took the reed from His hand, hit Him with it and spit on Him.

It is one thing to die, and quite another to endure this kind of humiliation. But it was something He had to do. It is hard to imagine the pain that Jesus suffered, not only the physical pain of scourging and beating, but the emotional and spiritual pain of betrayal—of being left entirely alone by His friends.

But there was one more thing Jesus had to endure, and it may have been the worst thing of all. When they had crucified Him and left him to die on the stake, God turned His back on Him and left Him utterly alone. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, *why* have you forsaken me," it came from the deepest heart of the man. He had not expected that. He had to *endure* it.

These were the things Jesus had to endure. He was helpless and alone, as no man has ever been alone. Yet, believe it or not, though Jesus was without help, He was in this moment far from helpless. He was finishing a work. By

enduring all this to the end, He was accomplishing your salvation. What He endured, He endured in your place, and His sacrifice has the power to turn your life around. His enduring made possible the resurrection from the dead. He opened the door into the presence of the Father for all mankind.

Everything in the plan of God depended on a situation where Jesus, to all outward appearances, did nothing. And yet He did more there than any man has ever done. He did it by enduring, by staying the course. He lasted.

And we also have to stay the course. The author of Hebrews wrote that it was like a race. "Let us lay aside every weight," he said, "and run with patience the race that is set before us." We have to keep running. We have to endure the pain, the boredom, the sacrifice. It requires patience, because it isn't the first lap that wins, or the second. We have to be there at the finish.

Hebrews goes on to say that we should run, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...." Jesus not only endured it. He carried it. It wasn't carried up the hill for Him. He fully participated in the deed. That is why He says to us, "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross."

What that means, in the simplest terms, is that we must bear up under whatever burden we have to bear. We have not merely to passively endure, but to positively, actively endure.

There is no point in feeling sorry for yourself. Hebrews continues: "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

It is true. Of all the things we have had to endure, whatever hardship, whatever privation or embarrassment, we are still alive. We have yet to die for the faith. And so when

we think we are really hurting, when we are in trouble, when we are suffering for the faith, when the whole world is coming down around our ears, when we feel there is nothing left we can do, we can still *endure*.

When it seemed like He had suffered every manner of torment they had to inflict, they led Him out to the ultimate punishment Rome had to offer. It was not merely death. It was the most humiliating and painful death they could devise. As a part of the humiliation, they demanded that Jesus carry His own stake out to Golgotha. He could have refused. What would they have done—killed him sooner? But He picked up His stake and carried it until He fell.

He expects us to do the same. He said:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed... (Luke 9:23-26).

We cannot complain that He never warned us. Why, then, do we moan and wail when we learn that the Christian way of life involves suffering? We who have followed Christ seem to expect that there should be no pain in our lives. Perhaps we were just not paying attention.

“You have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,” continues Hebrews. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye *endure chastening*, God dealeth with you as sons” (Hebrews 12:5).

It happens that, from time to time, God chastens His children. This also is something we must *endure*. As always, endurance is more than just letting it happen. Enduring is a positive, active acceptance of love, even when that love is expressed in a way that causes pain.

“Looking diligently,” Hebrews continues, “lest any man fail of the grace of God...” (verse 15). How could that happen, and how is it connected with endurance? The illustration chosen here is instructive: “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

Endurance need not be a matter of persecution and death. Esau could not even endure hunger for the sake of his birthright. It is no caprice that leads God to require us to go one day a year without food. He wants us to fast. He wants us to learn what it is like to be hungry. He wants us to feel it. Esau was hungry, and for one morsel of food he sold his birthright. Sometimes the test of endurance can be so small. But how can we expect to endure the great trials, unless we practice and succeed on the small ones.

“Lift up the hands that hang down,” says Hebrews. “See that you refuse not him that speaketh,” He continued. Straighten up. Don’t go around looking like a whipped dog just because you have been called on to endure a trial. “For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

There is coming a time of testing that will surpass all the great earthquakes of the past. The question God is resolving

is what will last, and what will not. Who has staying power: “And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:27).

Those who cannot be shaken are those who have learned, through trials great and small, to *endure*—those who have learned to willingly, even cheerfully, accept the burden laid upon them. Those who endure are those who willingly pick up their cross and struggle down the street behind Christ; who look the enemy in the eye and refuse to give up; who refuse to cash in their chips before the game is over.

There is one more important thing to know: There is no way to find out what cannot be shaken without shaking everything. There is no way to find out who will endure without turning up the heat.

And God must know. *We* must know. “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,” Hebrews continues, “let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”

It may well be that, when you get to the end of your rope, when it seems there is nothing left that you can do, that the most important thing you ever will do lies just yet ahead. Don't give up. Tie a knot in the rope, and hang on. □