

Endurance

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and endurance in the Christian life, looking to Jesus as our model and source of strength, and understanding God's training and chastening as education and correction.

Duration: 33:50

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2, Hebrews 12:12-16

Topics: "Endurance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of losing his sermon files on his computer and finding them in a different location. He humorously suggests that all technological devices are demon possessed. The main focus of the sermon is on the importance of faith and endurance in the Christian life, particularly in the face of trials and challenges. The speaker emphasizes the need to maintain spiritual vitality and to look to Jesus as the source of strength and help. The sermon also highlights the idea that God's training and testing in our lives is evidence of His love and that it continues until we see Him face to face.

Transcript

Good morning. I just want to go over these verses with you today because they're a very important passage of Scripture. All Scripture is important, but I think there's a great deal of misunderstanding with regard to these verses.

The last three chapters of Hebrews, the subject is faith and endurance, faith and endurance. And chapter 11 has to do with the great heroes of faith in the Old Testament. And now chapters 12 and 13 go on to endurance.

We're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, it says, first of all in verse 1. Some people think that refers to the saints in heaven looking down over the balcony and observing what is going on in earth. Others, and I agree with the others more, although both are possible, I think the saints referred to in chapter 12, verse 1, refer back to the ones in the previous chapter. The previous chapter.

Great heroes in the race of faith. And they're witnessing to us, they're not so much spectators, but they're witnessing to us by their lives of faith. For them, faith made the future present and it made the invisible visible.

And that's what faith does. It's exactly what it does. And we're called to a life of faith.

He says, let us lay aside every weight. A weight is anything that hinders us in the race of faith. It isn't necessarily the same for each one of us.

It could be different for each one of us. But we must scrutinize our lives day by day and put away things that would hinder us in the pressing on toward the mark for the prize of God in Christ Jesus. The sin which so easily ensnares us.

Well, the previous chapter had to do with faith. The opposite of faith is unbelief. And I think the sin that so easily ensnares us is unbelief.

Some days our faith is so strong. Other days when the trials come and the difficulties arise, it's just a different story. Run with endurance.

What is endurance? Well, I'd like to give you some definitions of it. Endurance is victorious steadfastness under trial. That's good, isn't it? Endurance in the Bible sense is victorious steadfastness under trial.

It's the brave and courageous acceptance of whatever comes to us in life. Good? It's the triumphant ability to bear things past the breaking point and not break. It's greeting the unseen future with a cheer.

Yes, I really wrote that in my notes. It's greeting the unseen future with a cheer. And shortly after I wrote that, I turned on my computer.

The biggest file in my computer is sermons. I went to get sermons and it wasn't there. It had gone.

I lost it. Tremendous. Greet the future with a cheer.

Incredible. All those years of work. Endurance.

We're called to a life of endurance. Well, before the dear brothers rush up here afterwards and offer to help me, I found it. Sermons had shifted over to books.

That was strange. How did that happen? Well, I guess it just crawled during the night on those unseen wires. I have no idea, however, that got under books.

None whatever. But it's there. And the whole experience confirmed my theory that all recorders, PowerPoint, computers, all of those things are demon possessed.

Somebody else has lost things, too. Christian life is a marathon, not a hundred yard dash. So many start well, but it's finishing well that really count.

Think of dear Noah. We read about him in chapter 11. Great man of faith that he ended his life with alcoholism.

Tragic, isn't it? Tragic to go on so well for years and to end in that way. I think of Gideon and what an illustrious life of military victory he had. Ended in encouraging idolatry among the people of God.

I think of Samson. Well, his whole life recorded. It certainly didn't get any better.

Ended in a sort of suicide. I think of Saul. This impresses me.

I'm going to read it to you. Samuel said, when you were a little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? Did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? Now the Lord sent you on a mission and said, go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they're consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil and do evil in the sight of the Lord? He said, I'm going to take the kingdom from you.

Sad, sad. David, what a man of God he was. Yet, close of his life was a dark cloud over it.

Mortuary, busy from time to time. Three of his sons dying tragically because of his, because of his sin. Solomon, how well he began picture of the Lord Jesus in his kingdom glory, and yet multiplied horses rather than depending on the Lord.

He depended on the horses. Married foreign wives who led him into idolatry. I think of Demas.

Demas is a puzzle to me in the New Testament. Paul says of him, Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. He loved the present world.

John says, if any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him. What does that mean? That Demas wasn't saved? Sounds like that, doesn't it? Yet, he labored with the Apostle Paul. Ended in obscurity.

And I think of the church at Ephesus and the Lord Jesus said to it, you have left your first love. He said so many good things about Ephesus. You've left your first love so easy to do.

It reminds us that we're never safe from falling until we step over the threshold of heaven. It's the truth. The ship may come back from extended voyage and go aground at the mouth of the harbor.

The race is set before us. The race of faith. I like the next verse, looking unto Jesus.

I'd like to pause over that, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. Dear friends, we want a Christ-centered ministry. We want that in our lives.

If I may just think with you about Christian radio here in the Bay Area. I don't know if you listen in the afternoon. I don't usually, but I turn it on.

And I hear this pop psychology. I hear dear women there telling how they apparently married a lemon in the garden of love. And they tell all the details of ruined lives.

And they're counseled with modern psychology. No word glorifying the Lord Jesus. No word looking after the Lord.

No word finding your strength in a life devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing like that. Self, self, self.

May I stand here today and tell you there's no victory in self. The victory is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think God's goal for us as assemblies too, as goals for the church, learn to live close to the Lord where you don't need to rush off to every local radio station and divulge all the personal details of your life.

Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. He's there at the beginning of the race of faith. He's there at the end of the race.

He shows us how to run the race of faith. Consider him who endured such hostility of sinners against him, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. Some of the Hebrews to which this was written had been persecuted.

They had found Christ to be the Messiah. And this enraged their families and their friends and their rabbis. They were persecuted.

They were driven out of their homes. They lost their employment. They were disinherited.

Everything conceivable happened to them because they had abandoned Judaism for the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was easy to be discouraged, easy to give up along the way. And the writer says to them, you have not yet resisted unto blood.

Jesus did. And Jesus is our model. To resist unto blood for them would mean martyrdom, wouldn't it? And he'd been going over some of those who did suffer martyrdom in the Old Testament.

And he says, you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons. I want to say concerning this next passage, I think it's greatly misunderstood.

My son despised not the chastening of the Lord. Two words used here are chastening and scourging. And I want to tell you, that sounds hard.

That presents a picture of the Lord with a whip, with a lash, with a rod. And it seems all he does is chasten us. It's a great misunderstanding.

May I suggest to you that when you come to those words, chasten and scourge in this passage, don't take them literally. Substitute the word train or educate, and you'll really get the thought of the passage. God is not a vengeful God, spanking his people all the time.

But he is educating us. He is training us. And what he does is done in love.

The word chastening here includes the idea of teaching, comforting, encouraging, correcting at times. But that's not the whole thing. Correcting is not the whole thing.

Most of it has to do with the same education that parents give their children. Please, when something happens in your life, don't think, what did I do wrong that God is punishing me? Just realize that God doesn't do anything but what you would do yourself if you could see the end as well as he does. If you could see the purposes to which he is working as well as he does, you would do exactly the same thing in your life.

Do not despise the training of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you're rebuked of him whom the Lord loves. He trains and educates everyone whom he receives. Punishing is only part of it.

What had these Hebrews done wrong? Well, if you look at the passage carefully, they hadn't done anything wrong. What was coming to them? Persecution was all for the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where did that come from? It didn't come from God.

It came from the devil. How did God do it? He overruled it for his glory and for their good. And I try to remember this when things go wrong in life, when they seem to go wrong in life.

You see a good illustration of it in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. The apostle Paul had a marvelous privilege of, whether in a dream, a vision, I don't know how, had a glimpse of heaven. And he heard things that it was not lawful for man to utter.

Tremendous temptation to become proud. None of the other apostles ever had that. God allowed something to happen to him, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

Did God send it? No, God didn't send it. Satan sent it, messenger of Satan to buffet him. But God overruled it.

And Paul said, most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. It's wonderful, isn't it? So when something untoward happens in your life, look at it as God's training. Lifetime is training time for reigning time.

God has a purpose in your life and in my life if you're a believer. That purpose is to produce Christ in you. We sang about that this morning, didn't we? We are to be models of Christ down here in preparation for the future.

Just think of that, we're going to reign with him. This world makes a mighty poor home. But it makes a mighty good school.

It's wonderful to think that everything that comes into our lives as believers comes in filtered through the love of God. They hadn't done anything wrong, I repeat. They hadn't done anything wrong at all.

They were being persecuted. God was using it to produce likeness of Christ in their lives. He goes on to say, for whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges everyone whom he receives.

There's that word, scourges. How do you explain that, MacDonald? It says scourge, and you know what the scourge was when they scourged the Lord Jesus. It was terrible.

Let me just say that the words chasten and scourge in this portion of scripture are a figure of speech known as metonymy. There you go, using big words again. What is metonymy? Well, it's where one word is used for another.

For instance, we say that man's face is steel. We don't mean that his face is metallic. We mean that his face is cold and hard.

He has a cold and hard appearance. We understand that. And we use expressions like that all the time.

I noticed this week in Proverbs chapter 1 where wisdom cries out to men to listen to her and they won't listen to her and they reap the consequences of not listening to her and she says she will laugh at their calamity. Laugh at their calamity? That sounds vengeful. That does sound worthy of wisdom who is incidentally a figure of the Lord Jesus.

Dear friends, it's a figure of speech again. It's the same figure of speech, metonymy, where one word is used for another. There's no laugh really involved.

Laughing at their calamity. We use similar expressions all the time. Have you ever heard the expression that man had the last laugh? It doesn't mean that he laughed at all.

It's just a figure of speech that means that maybe by his argument he was able to say the final word and all contentions ceased. I don't know whether the expression is still used. Then you laugh at the other side of your face.

You ever hear that expression? Laugh on the other side of your face. It doesn't mean that there's a literal laugh involved in that. It means that you'll have to drink your own medicine.

Nothing more than that. Just drink your own medicine. And so I plead with you today when you read this passage of Scripture and come to those words chastening and scourging.

Please don't take them literally. They are metonymy for pain and suffering and trials that come to a believer in this life. Are you with me? It's all they are.

Words used in a poetic sense to drive the truth home to us. Training is a mark of sonship. God deals with people as sons by training them.

And we are sons of God if we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we've had human fathers who corrected us. We paid them respect.

Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of Spirit and limb? Father of Spirit. Father of all living creatures. Father of all living creatures.

Spoken here on as spirit. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present but grievous. Nevertheless afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it.

Hmm. Human parents train us temporarily. I mean, when you reach eighteen it's pretty well over.

And they do it the best way they know how. But we have a father who trains us and he does it all in love and he does it all perfectly. So that a man like David could go through deep trials and say at the end of the trials it's good for me that I have been afflicted.

And a lot of us have had that experience too. We've seen God's hand in it. We saw him producing results that couldn't be produced in any other way.

And we think, boy, that's really wonderful that God cares for me enough to do that. So let's notice the following things concerning God's training. We should lay aside every hindrance.

Allow him to have his way in our lives. We should avoid the sin of unbelief. We should run with endurance.

I never come to that word endurance without thinking of an experience in my life. When a group of us were over in France, I was the oldest one. I was a man and they were young kids.

And we were going door to door and we couldn't speak French. So before we went, we had to memorize a single sentence in French. Jésus Christ a changé ma vie.

Je suis heureux depuis. Jésus Christ has changed my life and I've been happy ever since. And we would go knock on the door and the woman would come to the door and we would say, Jésus Christ a changé ma vie.

Je suis heureux depuis. And she probably thought we were rowing with one oar. But we all developed very sore noses doing this all day long.

You say, well, sore nose, what from having so many doors slammed in our face. And I remember at the end of the day when it would be easy to think about beds and comfort, you know. And we're climbing a hill and the young fellow who was with me recited that poem.

He said, Does the road lead uphill all the way? Yes. To the very end. Does the way we tread last the whole long day? To the very end, my friend.

And he was looking at the future with a cheer. He was enduring with a cheer. I think that's beautiful.

One of the great lessons in today's passage is look to Jesus. Find your comfort. Find your strength in Him, not in pop psychology.

He endured the cross. He despised the shame. I love that.

For the joy that was set before him. What joy? The joy of having his bride in heaven with him. The joy of changing us by faith in him.

Changing us into his likeness and having us with him for all eternity. And now he's exalted the right hand of the throne of God it says. And we should not become weary or become discouraged in the pathway ahead.

God's testing is an evidence of his love. If we've accepted parental training how much more should we accept his which is perfect. And incidentally God's training lasts only as long as it's necessary and useful.

That's why it never ends in this life. Let me say that again. God's training lasts only as long as it's necessary and useful.

That's why it never ends in this life. But when we see him we shall be like him and his training will end then. There are three ways in today's passage that we can react to his training.

One is we can despise it. And that's a foolish thing to do. To despise the training of God.

God who knows what's best. God who has infinite wisdom. We should never despise his training.

We can become discouraged and that's easy to do. We can become discouraged in his training. We can profit by it.

Lord Jesus what do you have for me in this? Work out your wonderful way in my life. I tell you it's a wonderful thing to put myself in the hollow of his hand and say just do with me as you like. Blessed Lord Jesus.

The poet says keep right on to the end of the road. Keep right on to the end. Though the way seems long in your heart's a song keep right on round the bend.

Though you're tired and weary still journey on till you reach that happy abode where all your love and dreaming of will be there at the end of the road. We can always find a good poem for all the circumstances of life I think. Renew your spiritual vitality.

I think that's good. I think Moffat in his translation of Romans 12 says maintain the spiritual glow. Isn't that good? Maintain the spiritual glow.

How do you do that? By just going on steadfastly for the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it says in verse 12 therefore strengthen the hands which hang down at the feeble knees. This is for people who have suffered maybe the loss of a loved one.

Going through severe marital problems. Unfaithful mate. Some form of addiction.

Drugs, liquor, pornography. Unemployment or financial problems. Look unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith.

Obeys the word of God and see him come to your help. Make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be dislocated but rather be healed. Walk on with a steady course.

Don't go off on tangents here and there. Just keep the Lord in view and go on steadfastly following him. Pursue peace with all men and holiness without which no man will see the Lord.

How do you understand that? Well we're sure of one thing. We never achieve perfect holiness down here. Positionally we are, believers are already holy.

Because believers are in Christ they already are made holy and that makes them fit for heaven. But practical holiness is something else and we achieve that day by day. We should be becoming more and more like the blessed Lord Jesus so that people looking at us may say that man makes me think of Jesus.

That happened to a young man in this assembly years ago Rob Luce guide of very serious illness. One day a nurse came to visit him, a visiting nurse and she said Rob makes me think of Jesus. And if you knew him, that was good.

That was good. Rob makes me think of Jesus. I tell you, friend, that's living.

When you live in such a way that people are thinking about the Lord Jesus. She also added and the interns coming over here to the house make me think of the apostles. I like that.

She had it all down, didn't she? Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. This is a danger and the writer brings up Esau. It says he's a profane fellow.

It means that he didn't have any regard for spiritual things, whatever. No regard for spiritual things. And he sought repentance diligently.

Wasn't able to find it. He's a classic case of an apostate. And of course this whole book is about the sin of apostasy and warning about it.

Well, I think the whole subject is dealt with very beautifully here. And once again, I just want to say in closing, don't be afraid of the passage. Don't be afraid of changing, chastening into training or scourging into teaching because it is poetic language.

It's metaphorical language and it refers to the same type of training that a parent carries on with a child. God does it perfectly. God does it as long as we're here, down here.

God has a good end in view. And he does it, as I say, as long as it's necessary and useful. So our part is to just open ourselves to him.

Trust in him. Life of faith and know that whatever he allows to come into our lives is filtered through his love, wisdom and power. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for your word.

Sometimes we come to a passage like this and it scares us when we think of your scourging and we think of the scourging of the Lord Jesus and how terrible it was. Help us to understand your word correctly. I do pray that we might all learn to live the life of endurance even when untoward things seem to happen.

I pray especially for the two young men who are going to be baptized this morning that they might go on faithfully for the Lord, that they might realize that baptism is not the end but that we're called to live a baptized life, those who have died with Christ and have been buried with him and who rise with him to walk in newness of life. We commit this following service to you in a very special way. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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