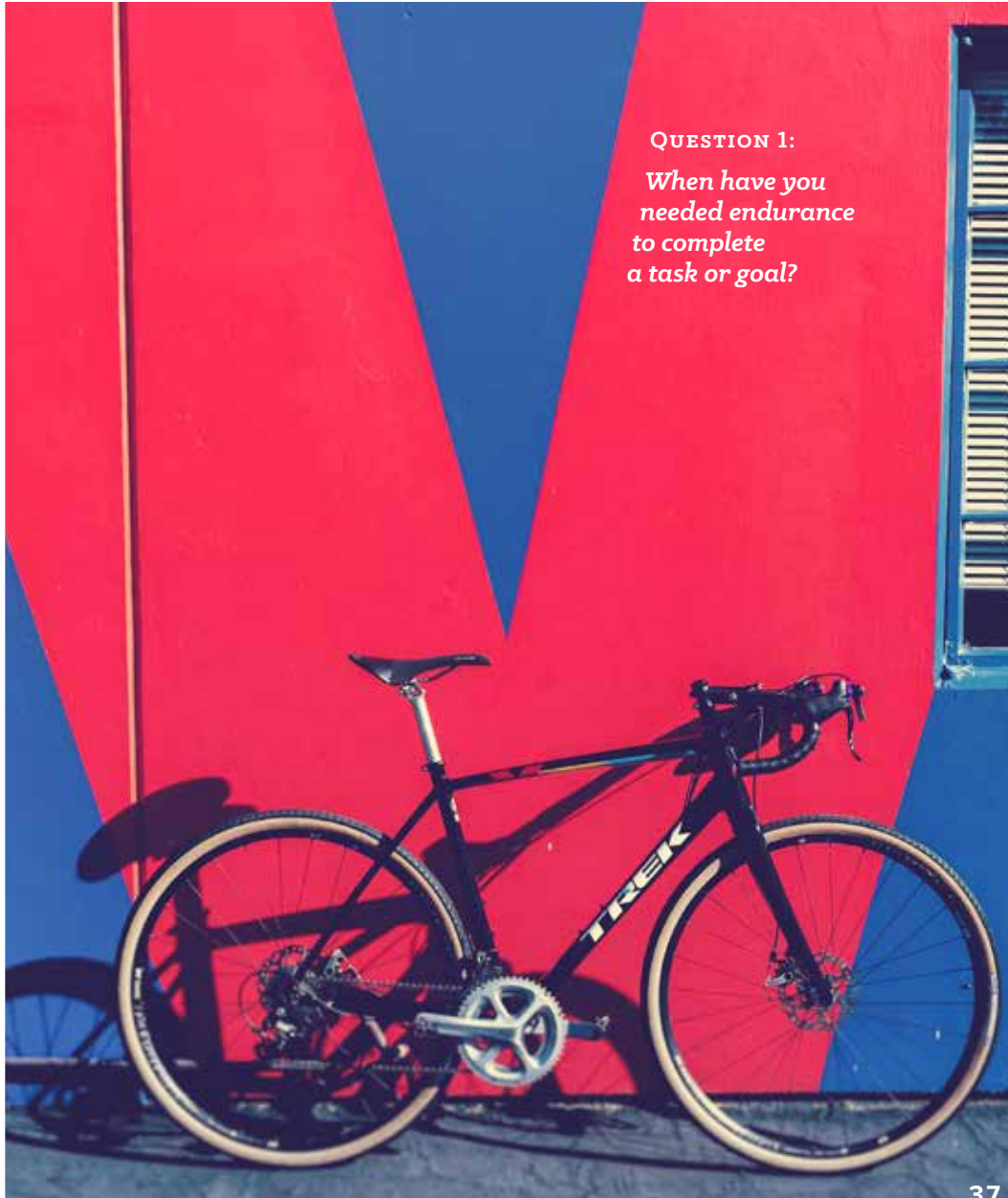


Session 4: The Endurance of Our Hope

QUESTION 1:
*When have you
needed endurance
to complete
a task or goal?*



THE POINT

We can endure suffering because of our hope in Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

No one signs up for pain, sorrow, disappointment, betrayal, or rejection, but they happen. Loving Jesus doesn't insulate us from pain and suffering. I learned that firsthand in 2018, when I was diagnosed with cancer. The treatments, coupled with the emotional roller coaster, were more than I expected.

At the same time, because of the prayers of the saints, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of the Great Physician, I have hope. I've had days when I had to choose to believe the promises of God, even when my feelings were overwhelming me or my mind was flooded with fear and doubt. Throughout the treatments, I claimed promises from Scripture. Some days I claimed them while praying, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" As I write this, all my scans are clear, and I rejoice!

But even more than clear scans, I rejoice in knowing Christ who sees, hears, knows, and cares. It is essential to our faith that we not let cancer or any other catastrophic or hurtful experience define us. Christ must be the source and sufficiency of our identity. We can endure because our hope rests in Him.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 PETER 3:8-12

⁸ Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, ¹¹ and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, ¹² because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

These verses in 1 Peter 3 are a series of summary statements—maturity checkpoints—for personal evaluation of our spiritual lives.

QUESTION 2:

Which piece of practical advice from these verses stands out to you most? Why?

Peter made a passionate appeal for consistency, faithfulness, and wholehearted obedience. He identified six ways we are to “walk the talk” and live out our faith.

- 1. Unity.** The command to “be like-minded” isn’t referring to minute details, but rather to unity on major points of faith. We should stop being petty about peripheral issues. Instead, we should concentrate on Jesus and what we have in common with other brothers and sisters in Christ.
- 2. Mutual concern.** To be “sympathetic” means to have compassion or to feel with others and suffer together. Peter called for believers to enter into another person’s life on more than just a superficial level, putting competition, envy, and jealousy aside.
- 3. Love.** Peter employed the Greek word *philadelphos* to convey Christian love as brothers and sisters. We reflect our love for Christ in how we love the family of God.
- 4. Compassion.** We live in a cold-hearted world where constant access to information can leave us insensitive and cynical. The church should be a place of compassion, where we err on the side of grace.
- 5. Humility.** Peter knew Christians must have a realistic impression of themselves. We measure ourselves by Christ’s holiness, and no room exists for boasting or pride.
- 6. Forgiveness.** An unforgiving spirit will disrupt fellowship, destroy joy, and ultimately send roots of bitterness deep into the heart. Life is too short to maintain a white-knuckle grip on offenses done to us. Peter urged the church to respond supernaturally through the Spirit, “not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing.” We have been forgiven by God, and we should offer the same forgiveness to those who’ve wronged us.

1 PETER 3:13-14

¹³ Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated,

Our hope in Christ will carry us through any difficult circumstances or suffering. We may experience times of unjust suffering because we stood up for what is right. Nonetheless, when our hope is rooted in Christ, enduring through such undeserved trials can strengthen us to face other troubling times.

I heard my mentor, Vance Havner, preach about the cheap way many Christians view the call to follow Christ. He said, “‘Lord’ is the most lifeless word in the Christian vocabulary. We have a cheap Christianity that does not cost us much. The shame and reproach of the old rugged cross means nothing more than a line in a hymnbook. ... Christianity is not a happiness cult; it is not a success cult. At heart it is the process by which God makes saints out of sinners. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son.”

As Lord, Jesus has universal sovereign authority. All will recognize His lordship when He returns (see Philippians 2:10-11), and His lordship makes it possible for believers to walk in victory today. We’d certainly like to believe that choosing what is right would make the path smooth and easy before us, and we usually don’t face persecution because of right choices. However, we’re living in a world where, increasingly, people suffer for righteous living. Warren Wiersbe wrote: “As Christians, we are faced with crises, and we are tempted to give in to our fears and make the wrong decisions. But if we ‘sanctify Christ as Lord’ in our hearts,

we need never fear men or circumstances. Our enemies might *hurt* us, but they cannot *harm* us. Only we can harm ourselves if we fail to trust God. Generally speaking, people do not oppose us if we do good; but even if they do, it is better to suffer for righteousness’ sake than to compromise our testimony.”¹

Our foundation of hope in Christ is secure. He is our rock, our cornerstone. Therefore, Peter affirmed that we don’t have to fear or be intimidated. The Greek word translated “intimidated” is *tarasso*; it means we don’t need to let others take away the calmness we have in Christ. In fact, we are blessed to be counted among those who suffer for righteousness’ sake. This should serve to encourage us and strengthen our resolve, not trouble us or shake our calmness of mind.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

QUESTION 3:

How has your hope in Christ helped you endure suffering?

ADVERSITY'S HOPE

First Peter 3:10-12 is a quotation from Psalm 34. Review the entire psalm and list descriptions of the people who will have hope through adversity.

H _____ (v. 2)

Those who l _____ to Him (v. 5)

P _____ (v. 6)

Those who f _____ Him (v. 7)

The person who t _____ r _____ in Him (v. 8)

H _____ ones (v. 9)

Those who s _____ the Lord (v. 10)

The r _____ (v. 17)

His s _____ (v. 22)

1 PETER 3:15-17

¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. ¹⁶ Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

When we're tempted to fear or get sidetracked, Peter has given us the only correct response: "But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." The conjunction "but" contrasts fear and intimidation to holiness and readiness.

1. **Holiness.** Peter recognized that if believers would sanctify—or set apart—Christ as holy in their hearts, we wouldn't be intimidated, but would rather be a bold witness to the life-changing power of the gospel.
2. **Holiness has to come first.** We will not have readiness in our speech or actions if living holy and set apart under the lordship of Christ is not our priority.

Paul admonished us: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness" (Romans 6:12-13). These verses teach us that there is a time to decide, a time for action that matches our belief. If we believe Jesus is Lord, then our actions and attitudes should reflect that. It means we yield our personalities to Him.

3. **Readiness.** Once we've settled the holiness and lordship issue, we can be ready to give a defense for the reason for our hope in Christ. We don't have to shrink back in fear when asked about what we believe; we can stand confidently in the lordship of Christ!

QUESTION 4:

How can we honor Christ in our interactions with those who cause us pain, conflict, or rejection?

Our readiness is gracefully tempered with gentleness. It is an attitude of humility that considers Christ and the other person more important than self.

Our readiness is also tempered with respect. When we set apart Christ in our hearts as holy, we will also give a gentle, holy response when defending the hope that is ours because of Him.

QUESTION 5:

When has suffering given you an opportunity to point others to Jesus?

“BY HAVING HOPE AND FAITH IN GOD, WE ACCESS

PEACE, COMFORT, AND UNDERSTANDING

THAT THE UNSEEN GOD IN OUR LIVES ON EARTH

IS VERY VISIBLE IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM.”

Brenda Miller Emmons



