

Enduring
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2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

In one of the key verses in today's passage, Paul uses two important words: "perseverance" and "endurance." What do you think is the difference between enduring and persevering?

There is an old expression: *"Keep on keeping on."* What do you think that means? Here's another old saying: *"When the going gets tough, the tough..."* Things had gotten tough for this new house church in Thessalonica (Greece.) They were running the Christian race well but being opposed and persecuted for their faith in Christ. Paul encouraged them (and us) to "keep on keeping on" by doing what he had taught them about Christ-like living.

Here's the point of this passage: When the going gets tough for followers of Christ (and it will), we just need to keep on keeping on doing what God's word has taught us to do and trust Him to do what only HE can do. In this passage we'll see some of the qualities of the Christ-follower who keeps on keeping on.

After a customary greeting and prayer for "grace and peace," Paul again begins with encouragement for these faithful followers:

3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. **4** Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

- Similar to his first letter to this church, their founding pastor Paul said he had been "boasting" about how they were living the Christian life.
- Why are we inspired to see the example of "enduring" Christ-followers?
- This isn't flattery or even fatherly pride. He's encouraging them and using them as an example, but verse three makes it clear it's about what God is doing through them. [Illustration. "What a beautiful flower garden, etc."]
- When the going gets tough, it's God's power that keeps us keeping on.
- Paul shows us how to spot a Christ-follower that keeps on keeping on.
- Verse three: A flourishing faith and love for one another.
- This principle is both vertical (to God) and horizontal (with others.)
- Why does the amount of our trust in God improve our love for others?
- Enduring Christ-followers keep on trusting God and loving others.
- Verse four brings us to the qualities of perseverance and endurance.
- One of my favorite writers, Jerry Bridges commented: *"The word perseverance is very similar in meaning to the word endurance, and often we equate the two. But there can be a subtle difference. The word endure*

means to stand firm...[w]e are to stand firm. We're not to be carried about with every wind of doctrine theologically...[b]ut we need to do more than stand. We need to move forward. When Paul says, "I have finished the race" (2 Timothy 4:7), obviously he was talking about motion. And perseverance means to keep going in spite of obstacles...We do need to stand firm...[b]ut remember, that's more than just standing still."

- That reminds me of Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) — 58** *...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*
- A "keep on keeping on" follower will stand firm on biblical truth and move forward in good works especially when we face opposition.
- Standing firm and moving sounds a lot like physical exercise to build muscles and physical endurance. Movement and resistance in weight training tears muscle fibers so they knit back stronger. That's painful!
- Even if we see this as good for us, most of us don't think of physical training as pleasant. As we "keep on keeping on" with physical training the pain lessens and the strength builds. We would like to avoid that exertion but as they say, "no pain, no gain." It's the same with our faith in God.
- Persecution, opposition and trials build our "faith muscles."

5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—

- Let's also read that in the New Living Translation: **5** *And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering.*
- Jesus said in **Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV) — 11** "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Christ-followers who keep on keeping on understand that persecution and insults because of our faith are "evidence" of living a life that is "worthy" to be called a Christ follower.
- Clarification: This isn't earning salvation by enduring suffering! That interpretation would contradict Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5-7.
- What about justice? Why not avenge ourselves and our good names?
- Paul spoke to that in his first letter: **1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV) — 15** *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*
- No matter how we are shunned, hurt, or insulted for Christ, the "keep on keeping on" Christ-follower leaves revenge to God.

6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, **7** and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **8** in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the

gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, **10** when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

- Wow! That's some serious "hell fire and brimstone" language, Paul!
- Why do people shy away from talking about eternal punishment?
- There is an old phrase: *"There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun."*
- As Christ-followers we shouldn't wish hell on anyone because the Lord doesn't desire anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9.)
- On the other hand, we rejoice that thanks to Christ's work on the cross, if we've trusted Him as Savior and Lord, hell won't be a part of our future.
- Christ-followers can keep on keeping on by leaving justice to God.

11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

- Verse eleven says it is God Who "enables" His followers "to live a life worthy of his call" and gives us "the power to accomplish all the good things" our faith "prompts" us to do.¹
- Back to an earlier point: When the going gets tough, it's God's power that keeps us keeping on. If we'll keep on trusting, loving, and obeying, He will give us the strength to keep on living a life that is "worthy of His call."
- What is the outcome?

12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- By the grace of God, the Christ-follower who keeps on keeping on will glorify God and one day in Heaven we too will be glorified.
- How do these verses motivate you to "keep on keeping on?" Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When the going gets tough, Christ-followers need to keep on keeping on.
- For most Christians the temptation is not "backsliding" but "slacking off."
- Some stop "keeping on" not because of persecution but for other reasons:
 - Laziness – Let the younger people take a turn. We might retire from ministry roles but we should never retire from ministry.
 - Disillusionment – "Church people" hurt me so I'm backing away from God. Where is the logic in that argument?
 - Selfishness – I did my part, now I want to do some things for ME. How likely are we to be satisfied and fulfilled without serving God?
 - Fear of embarrassment – If I stand firm in this culture people will think I'm weird. What the world calls "weird," Christ calls sanctified. Jesus said, ²⁶ *If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the*

Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his gloryⁱⁱ

- The bottom line: When the going gets tough for followers of Christ (and it will), we just need to keep on keeping on doing what God's word has taught us to do and trust Him to do what only HE can do.
- This week, let's "keep on keeping on!"

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (2 Th 1:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Lk 9:26). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.