

EXAMPLES OF STEADFASTNESS, PART 2
SELECTED SCRIPTURES

Many of you have exercise routines. You enjoy getting out in the morning and running for 30-60 minutes, or heading to the gym after work to lift some weights and put in some cardio work. I'm guessing that none of us has a workout routine like **Candice Burt**.



On May 24 last year, she woke up in her home in Boulder, CO, had some granola and coffee for breakfast and then went to her favorite bagel shop for a bagel. So far, so good. And then, despite an “epic thunderstorm” she ran a marathon — 26.2 miles. It was a kind of “cool down.” Because the day before she had run a little more than an ultramarathon, which is 50 kilometers. In miles, an ultramarathon is 31.068 miles, so to make sure she ran a true ultramarathon, she ran 32 miles. And then cooled off the next day with a simple marathon. Remarkable.

Except the remarkable feat was not that she ran 32 miles the day before running a marathon — it's that for 200 days in a row she ran 32 miles — *and then* “cooled down” with the marathon on May 24. For 6-1/2 months, every single day she ran 32 miles. In snow, sleet, rain, and sun, she ran. At home, and on vacation, she ran (even in the dark at 2 a.m. after landing for a late night flight to Hawaii). In 200 days, she ran 6400 miles — almost equivalent to running from Seattle, WA to Fort Meyers, FL — and back. What do you do after that? An interviewer wrote: “Burt doesn't have a specific goal for what's next. She's curious about the idea of a record-pushing cross-country run, but doesn't have a plan yet. Mostly she's happy to be around her home more, with her daughters and dogs. On Thursday, she planned to taper down with a 20-mile run. You know, a relaxing distance like that.”

You hear stories like that and you just can't imagine the endurance that it would take. And you think, “I like to exercise, but nope, not me. No way.”

As remarkable as that story is, there are many more stories of greater endurance spiritually. Pressures and weights that have been put on people and in spite of those pressures, they have remained faithful to Christ (consider **Heb. 11**, esp. **vv. 36-38**). And some of you are in similar difficulties that are tempting you to give up on Christ. The Bible would have us understand that our circumstances are not unique and that others in similar situations have stayed the course. So this morning let us look at the stories of four individuals and how they remained steadfast in hard, but typical circumstances. As we look at these situations, we learn...

STEADFASTNESS IS POSSIBLE IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE BECAUSE GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT.

When enticed to despair, consider **four examples** of faithfulness in the Bible:

1. Joseph: He **RESISTED** When He Was **TEMPTED** (Gen. 39)

- The key to Joseph's fight against sinful temptation was that he lived in fellowship with God and in dependence on His grace. The key to the story is *the Lord was with Joseph* (vv. 2, 3, 5). And while it is not said in this context, later Joseph says, *I fear God* (42:18). That fellowship is what drove him to say in **v. 9** *how could I do this great evil and sin against God?* In the moment, he correctly identified the sin for what it was: an evil rebellion against God; *because* his heart was satisfied with God sin was unsatisfying to him and he was able to clearly identify it.
- Love for God and Christ is always the first step in being steadfast (resolute) against sin:
 - ✓ You know the principle that you cannot love God and wealth (Lk. 16:13; Mt. 6:24); the way to not love wealth (or anything else that is a sinful temptation) is to stimulate your love for God.
 - ✓ There is one great commandment for all men — we were created for this: **Mk. 12:28-31**.
 - ✓ Augustine rightly said, "There can only be two basic loves, the love of God unto the forgetfulness of self, or the love of self unto the forgetfulness and denial of God." We love God to forget & leave sin.
 - ✓ Fight and resist sin by creating a greater delight in Christ.

2. Philemon: He **FORGAVE** When He Was **SINNED-Against** (Philemon)

- The story of Onesimus and Philemon do two things for us:
 - ✓ It models for us what confession (repentance) and forgiveness look like (the obligations of both).
 - ✓ It teaches us how to prepare to forgive when brothers come to us with repentance.
- We teach that there are two types of forgiveness:
 - ✓ *Heart forgiveness* (Mk. 11:25) when someone either does not or cannot (e.g., because of death) confess of sin. The Lord does not allow us to hold onto those offenses and cultivate bitterness — Eph. 4:26-27 applies to that situation as well.
 - ✓ *Transacted forgiveness*, when the sinner confesses (repents of) his sin and we forgive.
 - ✓ The second act of forgiveness is what is in view in Philemon; the apostle Paul is graciously preparing Philemon to do the hard work of forgiveness.
 - Sin always costs the sinner something (and the sinner, too).
 - Letting go (freeing) the debt is hard, but it emulates what Christ has done for us (**v. 18**).
 - Forgiving restores and preserves the relationship, unifies the church, and emulates Christ.
 - One theologian wrote, "He who has not forgiven an enemy has not yet tasted one of the most sublime enjoyments of life." [Lavater]
- This kind of extravagant forgiveness is what Paul prepares Philemon (and us) to do.

3. Job: He WORSHIPPED When He Was SICK (Job 1-2)

- To say that there is a lot of suffering in this world is like saying “there is a lot of water in the ocean” or “there is a lot of heat in Texas in August” or “there are a lot of sick people in the hospital.”
 - ✓ We are surrounded by suffering of various forms; at times it feels overwhelming (like when we would regularly go to Cook’s Hospital with Emily for her hearing impairment).
 - ✓ The physical pressures in suffering tempt us to discouragement, despair, and departure from God.
 - ✓ That seems to be the story of Job — it is a story of suffering and God’s action in our suffering: “is the world well-managed by God?” But it’s not only a story of suffering; it’s a theology of worship.
 - ✓ The question Job answers is “does man worship God for convenience, or conscience?”

“Job is not about the problem of pain at all. Details of suffering serve as the ingredients of the story, the stuff of which it is made, not the central theme. A cake is not ‘about’ eggs, flour, milk, and shortening. It merely uses those ingredients in the process of creating a cake. In the same way, Job is not ‘about’ suffering but merely uses such ingredients in its overall theme.” [Yancey, in *CT*, 6/13/86, 19.]

- Here is the message of Job — he worshipped God when he was sick — not just sick, but suffering unrelentingly. And when his friends accused him. And when his wife (who was also a sufferer — her children also died...) exhorted him to curse God and give up on his faith. But he was steadfast.
- Remember all the tragedy of Job’s life (1:6-22; 2:1-10) —
 - ✓ All his sons and daughters were together for a celebration and the Sabeans attacked and killed all the oxen, donkeys, and all the servants (except for one who escaped to tell Job, 1:15).
 - ✓ Fire from heaven burned up all his sheep and servants (except for one who escaped to tell Job, 1:16).
 - ✓ Chaldeans raided and killed all his camels and servants (except for one who escaped..., 1:17).
 - ✓ A great wind (tornado?) blew against the house where his children were celebrating and destroyed the house and killed all the children and servants (except for one who escaped to tell Job, 1:18-19).
 - ✓ Job was afflicted with boils and illness that took him to the edge of death (2:6-8). He had inflamed ulcerous sores, persistent itching, disfigurement of his face (2:12), loss of appetite (3:24), despondency (3:25), loss of strength (6:11), worms in his boils (7:5), difficulty breathing (9:18), foul breath (19:17), weight loss (19:20); perpetual pain (30:17), blackened and peeling skin, and fever (30:30).
 - ✓ Satan was the greatest (most powerful) of the angels and Job was the direct recipient of Satan’s greatest attacks (not just the demons); likely no one on earth, apart from Christ, has ever had more satanic force and power unleashed against him. But he was steadfast (though sometimes shaky).
 - ✓ Calamity didn’t just come “calling” for Job — it “kept calling.” The suffering was relentless.
 - ✓ And just in case we think Job is unique in his physical suffering, remember Heb. 11:36-38. Suffering and death are one-out-of-one in this world. It is the norm. And it is possible to be steadfast in it.

- How did Job remain steadfast in his worship, even while suffering?
 - ✓ **Before any calamity struck Job, he worshipped and loved God**, fearing Him and resisting temptation (1:1). In fact, he was chosen for suffering *because of his righteousness*. Like Joseph, Job did not wait until the trial to figure out what to do. His heart was attentive to God from the beginning.
 - ✓ Job had no moral blemishes, did not deviate from God's standards, revered and submitted to God & avoided anything contrary to God (affirmed by God, 1:8; 2:3). His character was innocent: he was highly respected (29:7-11), a fair and honest judge (29:7, 12-17), a wise counselor (29:21-24), and honest employer (31:13-15), hospitable and generous (31:16-21), and a lover of God (1:1).
 - ✓ Job's suffering proves that "Job's reverence is not mercenary as though God himself were of no value. No, Job's reverence is based on the value of God for who God is in himself. The revelation of this truth is so important that God is willing to subject his prize servant to grief and poverty in order to make it known." [Piper, "Reverent in Suffering."]
 - ✓ **Job lived out his faith in his suffering**. Though he complained, his response at the beginning of the trials is overtly godly and he is rewarded by God for faithfulness at the end. Yes, he did complain, and yes, he did misunderstand things about God's nature, but the overall trajectory of his life *while suffering*, was towards worship of God — and God considered him righteous and faithful (42:7, 10).
 - ✓ When suffering, our calling is to be faithful to the One who is faithful to us (1 Thess. 5:24).
 - ✓ Our suffering tempts us to believe that all things are dark and black. Don't give up in the dark what God has revealed in the light.

- **What Job teaches us —**
 - ✓ **Suffering is normal in this world — expect it**. The Bible says the world is broken and there will be trouble. When we suffer something has "gone wrong," but it is not unusual and is in God's plan...
 - "...the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance..." (2 Cor. 1:5)
 - "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..." (Phil. 1:29)
 - "For indeed when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know." (1 Thess. 3:4)
 - "...join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God..." (2 Tim. 1:8)
 - "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 2:3)
 - "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED..." (1 Pt. 3:14)
 - "But resist [Satan], firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. (1 Pt. 5:9-10). [V. 8 — Satan prowls by afflicting w. suffering.]

- ✓ **Prepare for suffering before suffering starts.** Job's two responses (1:20-22; 2:10) almost certainly were believed prior to his suffering; they came out when pressure increased. What are the truths that you want to come out of your mouth when you suffer? We need to practice today.
- ✓ **Our suffering today is not the end.** There is hope for "redemptive reversals" on earth (ch. 42); and there is certain hope for final redemption in eternity. No one in Heaven is disappointed or embittered by what they suffered on earth. (Read stories of the martyrs...)
 - "When it is your duty to suffer for Christ, look upon it also to be your privilege, and be glad of the opportunity, rejoicing that you have anything to part with for the sake of Christ." [T Vincent]
 - "I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain." [Spurgeon]
- ✓ **No matter how you suffer, it is always possible and profitable to worship God.** That's where Job began and that's where the book ends. We worship God because He is God and because He is good.

4. An Unnamed Father: He BELIEVED When His Faith was WEAK (Mk. 9:14-27)

- In Mark 9, Jesus has been separated from most of the disciples for a short time, but in the middle of the chapter He returns to find the disciples in a dispute with the **Scribes** (v. 14) in front of a large crowd.
 - ✓ A man brought his demon-possessed son *to Jesus* (v. 17), but finding Jesus gone, asked the disciples to cast out the demon, and they couldn't (v. 18b).
 - ✓ The **argument** with the Scribes was probably them mocking the disciples for their inability.
 - ✓ Don't miss the explanation of what happened to the son (likely a teenager, v. 21 — **from childhood**):
 - He was **possessed with a spirit** — he is a sufferer, experiencing something he did not ask for; like an illness, demon possession is almost always in NT an affliction and not a sin.
 - The boy was suffering physically — mute, uncontrolled violent actions (**slams to the ground**), **foaming** at the mouth, **grinding teeth, stiffened** (v. 18); all these happened in front of Christ (**convulsions**, v. 20).
 - The parents were also suffering — **often thrown into the fire...water to destroy...** The demon was seeking to destroy/kill the child; the parents were always watching and vigilant. How exhausted were they from their attention to him? Their suffering was different, but they suffered too.
- So with Jesus now in front of him (remember v. 17), the father makes his request — **if you can...** (v. 22)
 - ✓ The form of the request indicates "since you can" (belief), but Jesus hears doubt in the request, so He responds, **"If you can?" All things are possible to him who believes...**
 - ✓ The dad not only appeals to Christ's power, but also His **pity** and compassion — "please care!"
 - ✓ Jesus is affirming the reality that as the God-Man He is unlimited in power
 - Ironically, the crowds had already affirmed the same thing (7:37).
 - The One who created all things (Jn. 1:3) is sovereign over all things and can do all things.

- ✓ To prove that He is God (powerful) and that God is compassionate, Jesus heals the boy (vv. 25-27)
- The key verse is v. 24 — the response of the father — ***“I do believe; help my unbelief.”***
 - ✓ Yes, he believed. But even in that belief, there was part of him that didn’t. His faith was imperfect.
 - ✓ You can understand that. He is physically weary. The days and nights are long, and the months and years of care have been even longer. He is exhausted. And he has likely sought help from doctors and perhaps the scribes (v. 14) — even the disciples. No one could help. So he believed Jesus could, but he also doubted.
 - ✓ You know what that’s like don’t you? Calvin did; he said, “ These two statements may appear to contradict each other but there is none of us that does not experience both of them in himself.”
 - ✓ This is the world we live in — we also believe and struggle to keep believing. But “a faith which declares itself openly and at the same time recognizes its weakness and pleads for help is a growing faith.” [Hiebert] Don’t stay in unbelief, but do admit your weakness to the Lord and ask for help.
 - ✓ [Aside: when you are counseling and discipling, remember that sometimes things may look like rebellion and disobedience, but they are actually just weakness, and we respond to weakness differently than rebellion: 1 Thess. 5:14.]
- Some lessons from the weak-faithed father:
 - ✓ ***When faith is weak, keep going to Christ*** (notice that the father didn’t leave when the disciples failed; he stayed around, hopeful in Christ and then immediately petitioned Christ when he saw Him)
 - ✓ ***It is faith that saves; it is not the quantity of faith that saves.*** Christ didn’t heal because of the quantity or strength of the father’s faith, but that the father had faith. Similarly, a weak faith in Christ saves, and a weak faith in Christ receives His daily mercy (and conversely, a strong faith in a wrong God will be of no benefit, Is. 44:14-17). God seeks your trust in Him; in His mercy, He won’t wait for a perfect trust (because there is no perfect trust this side of Heaven).
 - ✓ ***Remember the object of your faith.*** Remember I said that Jesus had been separated from most of the disciples? Do you know where He was? He was on a mountain — with Peter, James, and John — being transfigured (revealed in His full deity) to the three. They saw the fulness of His glory.
 - In our troubles, it’s tempting to forget the nature of Christ. He is not a good man. He is God-Man. And He has the power of the infinite God and He has the compassion of unchanging God.
 - Whatever your trouble, if you are a believer in Christ, all the power of the Godhead is not just near you to help, but it (He) is *in* you to help. Don’t let the size of your problem overwhelm the transcendence of eternal God.
 - Whatever your trouble, if you are not a believer in Christ, there is no way out — until you believe in Him. Then, there is every way out. You must repent and believe that Jesus is fully God and that He died to pay for your sin and to give you ability to and delight in living for Him (10:45).

5. Summary: Your Circumstances May Be **HARD**, but They Are **TYPICAL** (1 Cor. 10:13)

- Whatever your situation, it is not uncommon. It may be hard, but it is typical. These four stories (and thousands more) affirm that. And in every trial, there is sufficient grace from God for it.
 - ✓ **Temptation** means “temptation” — an enticement or allurements to sin.
 - ✓ But it can also mean “trials” and weights (cf. **Is. 1:2**). While it appears that Paul is thinking about our inward desire for and inclination to sin (e.g., vv. 6-10), every difficulty on this earth is in connected in some way to the fall into sin (Gen. 3). The world became broken at that point and not only were all people made sinners, but illness, suffering, and death also resulted.
- Paul is very clear: there are many (various) trials and temptations in this world, but they are all **common** — **there is nothing unusual in your life**. It’s all typical of this world.
- Solomon was exactly right — “There is nothing new under the sun.” People’s lives are made up of the same kinds of temptations as they always have been. Particular circumstances may change (lying on tax return), but the base temptations are the same. Read Genesis:
 - ✓ Pride and blame-shifting
 - ✓ Depression
 - ✓ Anger and murder
 - ✓ Greed and covetousness
 - ✓ Worry and anxiety
 - ✓ Unbelief of God
 - ✓ Drunkenness
 - ✓ Lying and deceitfulness
 - ✓ Manipulation & self-justification
 - ✓ Family feuds — favoritism
 - ✓ Sexual sin — adultery, fornication, incest and polygamy
- ✓ And into that mess steps God — **and God is faithful**. Paul means just that — **God is constant**; He is always what He is. He is unchanging and undeviating. He is trustworthy. In your temptation, you can trust Him to provide you with what you need. In your trial and burden you can trust that He will always do what is good for you. That God is faithful is a great comfort to those who love Him and want to honor Him (but still struggle with sin).
- In His faithfulness, **God will give you what you need** — **He will provide the way of escape...**
 - ✓ It is because God gives a way of escape that Paul also says, **you will not be tempted beyond...** You don’t have to fail in your trial because God has provided what you need for that (common) trial. He is not perplexed about how to get you out. He knows what to do and is able to do what He knows.
 - ✓ Jay Adams has rightly observed: “Every box has its way out; every problem has a solution; every trial will come to an end for God’s children.” [“Christ and Your Problems.”]
 - ✓ There is much discussion about the various escapes that God provides (notice imv’s of **vv. 7-10, 11, 14**).

- ✓ There is an even bigger principle — God will give you what you need — Himself (vv. 1-4). Those verses refer to the salvation of the people of Israel and God's spiritual provision for the nation. They had what they needed in Him. Their problems began when they became dissatisfied with Him (v. 5). So the solution to endurance is salvation and sanctification — to know Him and to love Him. To be saved by Him and to stay with Him. We have faith for salvation and we follow in love.
- ✓ That doesn't mean our difficulties will go away; to live in a fallen world means that until we get to Heaven there will always be problems of various kinds. But it does mean that in every difficulty, the way out (and the way to perseverance and steadfastness) is to cultivate affection for Him. That's always the starting point in our problems.

CONCLUSION: Your Circumstances May Be HARD, but They Are TYPICAL. (And God's grace is sufficient). You aren't alone in your trouble. Others have suffered also. And others are suffering with you. And many have experienced God's gracious provision and been faithful to Christ. So be steadfast. Hold onto God.

- ✓ Don't be enticed by the temptations of sin.
- ✓ Don't be embittered by the difficulties of relationships.
- ✓ Don't be discouraged by the persistence of pain and death.
- ✓ Do cling to the Lord in every circumstance of your life. Do cultivate your love and affection for Him, and He will see you through and equip you to be steadfast.

BENEDICTION (David): 1 Cor. 15:58