

Following the Footprints

Endurance- Part II

James 5:10-11

I've heard it said several times in the past that every believer is either coming out of a storm, or experiencing a storm, or heading into a storm.

Perhaps you've been a Christian long enough to discover the fact that Christianity doesn't settle the storms of life; sometimes it stirs them up.

You are in the process of discovering that integrity does not guard you from tribulation, it guarantees it.

Little wonder then that God is just as interested in developing in us endurance as He is holiness.

Why? Because He knows that holiness can't make it without endurance. To put it another way, purity will require perseverance, because if you didn't care about purity, you wouldn't need to persevere, right?

If you didn't care about holiness, you wouldn't need to develop endurance.

If you've decided to live all out for Jesus Christ, you're in the process of discovering that your Christianity doesn't calm the storms, it creates them.

You are either living in one, coming out of one, or heading into the next one.

I find it fascinating that a large part of the development of endurance in the believer's mind and heart while encountering a storm is to remember others who've suffered through them, leaving footprints for us to follow.

The chief example above all others is Jesus Christ of whom Peter wrote, in his first letter, *Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21)*.

The word translated, example, referred to the custom of teaching a child how to write in ancient

times. One author writing about 75 years after Peter used the word to refer to a child's exercise book, where letters of the alphabet were written out for the child to either trace or copy.ⁱ

So Peter writes, Christ has left us the alphabet of obedience, and we trace over the letters with our lives.

Peter adds at the *end of verse 21, for us to follow in His steps.*

The word '*steps*' literally refers to footprints— watch which way Christ walked . . . follow the footprints and move in the direction He moved.ⁱⁱ

By the way, Jesus Christ may be the perfect model for the believer, but He isn't the only example.

In fact, most believers would say, "I'll never walk like Christ". Walking in His footprints is like a 5 year old trying to step into the snow tracks of his older brother.

- And perhaps for that reason, the grace of God would give us other examples to follow as well. The Apostle Paul would say to the Corinthians, "*Be imitators of me.*" (*1 Corinthians 4:16*)
- The writer of *Hebrews* would write, "*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.*" (*Hebrews 13:7*)
- The Thessalonians are challenged to follow the example of Timothy and Silvanus as Paul writes in *2 Thessalonians 3:7*, "*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example because we did not act*

in an undisciplined manner among you. Later in verse 9, he writes, *we offered ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.*

Follow their footprints . . . they're heading in the right direction.

The Apostles chime in and effectively say, "Take a look at the footprints of other believers – they may very well be leading by example in the matter of holiness – but also in the display of endurance.

Marsha and I were at a convention not too long ago. I was by myself trying to find my way to one particular session in this convention center—a convention center that is literally 600,000 square feet under one roof and I was completely lost. I should have been dropping bread crumbs along the way.

I walked into one banquet room which was completely empty. I had struck out again, but before I could turn around and exit I heard a couple of voices singing . . . I looked around the corner and saw Joni Erickson Tada sitting in her wheelchair and two adults standing next to her and they were all singing praise to God.

Many of you are familiar with her testimony of having broken her neck in a diving accident when she was 17 years old. She is now 60 years old and known by millions for her commitment and faith in Jesus Christ and perhaps even more inspiring—her endurance.

One of her goals has been to give a wheelchair to the 18 million people around the world who need one along with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is little doubt in my mind that James, the Apostle, was writing to people who were discouraged and despairing. His opening lines have dealt with suffering and trials and now his closing lines bring back the subject.

From what we've already learned in this letter, these Jewish believers have been exiled from their homes. They've lost everything. They've had to start over from scratch, many of them have suffered abuse and mistreatment and probably worse. They've even turned on one another.

Beginning in *verse 7 of chapter 5, James* has begun writing out the alphabet of faith and endurance.

In our last study, James took us all to a farm where we were to learn the lessons of patience from a farmer who ploughs and plants and weeds and sweats and then waits.

What he does next is point us to some footprints left behind by those who've walked the path of obedience.

These are the footprints of faith . . . and James will effectively say, "Follow them!"

The Footprints of Prophets

Notice *verse 10. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

You want to develop endurance? Here's another example not just an unnamed farmer, but the prophets of God who delivered the message of God. Take a good look at the footprints of the prophets.

James audience of dispersed Jewish believers would be able to immediately recall the prophets of their past and especially the underlying themes of suffering and enduring and not because the prophets disobeyed God, but because they disobeyed.

James audience would recall the testimony of Hosea's personal shame and sacrifice as he repeatedly brought his unfaithful wife back home as an example of God's unfailing covenant love for Israel.

They would remember the prophet Jeremiah who fearlessly preached the truth to his nation and as a result faced constant persecution. On one occasions he was thrown into an abandoned well where he sunk in the mud and would have died had it not been for the pity of others.

Ezekiel watched his wife suddenly taken in death and yet obeyed God's command to continue serving Him.

These Jewish believers would have thought of Micah who was ridiculed and slandered for his message of truth; for the prophet Zechariah who was murdered for his faithful testimony; for Amos and Haggai also who suffered for their obedient endurance to their calling from God; of Isaiah who was eventually placed in a hollow tree and sawn in half by his own king.

Prophets were not commissioned by God to make friends and influence people by compromising their message. They were never guaranteed success.ⁱⁱⁱ

In fact, they were often told that they could expect the opposite.

Jeremiah was told to get up and preach but that nobody was ever going to listen to him. (*Jeremiah 7:27*)

I wonder how many preachers today would deliver their message after being told by God that no one would ever really listen.

James knew that his audience would immediately resonate with the obvious fact that none of the prophets were well treated and revered by their generation.

Jesus Christ would condemn the nation Israel by describing Jerusalem as a city who killed the prophets and stoned the messengers sent to her by God. (Matthew 23:31)

But James would also know that he would be encouraging the believers as they were encouraged to follow the prophets' example of endurance, because he knew, and they all knew, the prophets weren't perfect people.

They weren't chosen or commissioned because they never struggled with their calling or doubted the plan of God or despaired in their circumstances.

I think of the prophet, John the Baptizer, the last of his kind sent to Jerusalem apart from Christ Himself.

John is sitting in a prison cell for having told Herod that he was an adulterer. The religious leaders weren't defending him either; he had called them all to repentance, daring to say that being a son of Abraham wasn't good enough.

And John is struggling with doubts about Christ. He's wondering if he's been following the wrong Messiah. Jesus wasn't fulfilling the prophecies John and others had expected, the prisoners weren't being set free, the rule of Rome was not being broken apart and in fact the prophet was in prison and would die at the hands of Rome.

So John sends out a group of his disciples to find Jesus and ask Him what to me is one of the most pitiful, genuine, despairing, emotionally charged questions anywhere in scripture—the question from John to Jesus was, “Are you really the coming One or should we look for someone else?”

Can you believe it? John had baptized Jesus. He'd seen the Spirit descending; heard the voice of God the Father from heaven validating the authenticity of God the Son; he'd watched Jesus perform miracles, and he'd heard Jesus Christ preach.

But I'm in prison and from what I hear, it's death row.

Jesus Christ graciously sends back His answer and the answer ends by the Lord saying through those disciples to John the prophet, ***Blessed is the one who doesn't stumble over Me (Matthew 11:6).***

In other words, stay the course John, even when the facts don't line up . . . keep on . . . endure, John, endure.

I have stood in John Wesley's chapel where he fearlessly risked his life preaching the truth throughout the 1700's. At one point he preached so passionately against slavery that his audience became so infuriated they rioted in the sanctuary and breaking apart the pews. Talk about endurance.

I have stood in the cathedral where John Knox preached with courage against the atrocities of his government which persecuted the believers living in the 16th century.

To this day, there is no grand monument in Scotland for his faithfulness, in fact his grave is under the asphalt of a parking lot outside the cathedral and one of the parking spaces is painted to mark his burial place.

Inside that same cathedral are the resting places of royalty and heads of state with their elaborate, ornate caskets of marble and stone.

And outside, underneath the parking lot are the forgotten remains of a man who endured to the end, buried underneath space #23.

I've wondered . . . do you think John Knox cares?

James is effectively reminding his audience that the prophets weren't honored in life, and they weren't honored in death . . . there were no monuments built to their glory—the pyramids were the grand resting places of Pharaoh's, not prophets.

And the prophets of God couldn't care any less right now. Even today we know better, because we call *them* truly blessed, and we pity the Pharaohs.

James adds that same exclamation point in the ***first part of verse 11 where he writes, “We count those blessed who endured.”***

In other words, we know intuitively in our hearts that those who suffer for righteousness sake are truly blessed. They are blessed by God and even to this day they are considered blessed by God's people!

It's true, isn't it? There is something admirable and inspiring about those who endure for God.

James is basically saying to his scattered, weary audience of exiled Jews, “To this day we consider the prophets of old who were persecuted and mistreated and even discouraged to be the ones who are truly blessed. And here we are talking about them centuries later.”

But the deeper question James is asking them and us is this—do we want to bless them or be one of them?

Where are your footprints going? In the direction of obedience—marked by endurance?

Oh, I love the testimonies of Knox and Wesley and of Martin Luther the reformer who said while on

trial for his faith, “Here I stand; I can do none other.”

I love that, but you don’t know what it’s like on the college campus. C’mon, that philosophy teacher will eat you for lunch if you speak up.

This is all great for Luther and Knox and Wesley, but my cubicle is next to an atheist on one side and a new ager on the other side and my boss across the hallway is a bitter man who thinks religion is for fools. I’m not qualified to settle the score.

James says, “Let me show you some footprints worthy of following.”

It may not be easy, but God will be faithful . . . and your footprints will point out the path for someone else to follow.

John Wesley would pray this prayer and you could easily entitle it, “Willing to Endure”.

Lord, put me to what You will;
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by Thee or laid aside for Thee;
Exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely yield all things to Thy disposal.
Thou art mine and I am Thine;
Amen.

James says, “Do you want to develop the muscles of endurance?” Then follow the footprints of the people who pray like that.

In fact, let me add a practical note for your spiritual development, read biographies of Christian servants.

If we’re to learn from the example of others who follow Christ not only should we read of God’s work through the prophets and apostles, but through the lives of men and women who served Him with endurance as well.

It has been my practice to keep at least one biography of a believer going year-round. I can’t tell you how encouraging it has been to see the testimony of God’s grace in the life of someone who persevered for Him. Our church library has dozens of biographies you can begin reading. You will be encouraged, convicted, and surprised.

I wonder, how many of you have read portions, or all, of that famous devotional by Oswald Chambers entitled, “My Utmost for His Highest.”

Have you read his biography? He didn’t write that book. His wife did . . . from lesson and sermon notes she had scribbled down in shorthand as Oswald taught the Bible in a small Bible school outside London to less than 30 students.

And then she took notes while Oswald taught soldiers stationed in Egypt during World War 1 where they served as missionaries with the YMCA. Located in the military camp, outside Cairo, Egypt in the sweltering heat that would reach 130 degrees, Oswald Chambers taught the Bible in an open tent to soldiers who were moving through camp.

Then unexpectedly, barely past 41 years of age, he died of complications from appendicitis, leaving his wife and their 4 year old daughter.^{iv}

After his death, his wife edited her notes of his messages into a devotional she entitled, *My Utmost for His Highest*, which by the way has sold more copies than any Christian book in history second only to the Bible.

Read a biography of a believer who endured and discover the truth that you don’t have to be well known to be well used by God.

Oswald Chambers taught 25 students . . . and soldiers stationed in Egypt . . . in a hut . . . and then died.

You don’t have to be all that visible to be usable.

See, God knew that He was preparing someone who endured years of ministry obscurity to influence millions of people worldwide . . . and only after he died.

Like the prophets of old.

We, like James, consider the footprints of obedient servants of God to be most blessed.

But then James adds another testimony, this one comes from the footprints of a patriarch.

The Footprints of a Patriarch

Notice *verse 11. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.*

In other words, it didn’t seem like it at first. Frankly, it looked like God had disappeared.

But you’ve all heard about the wisdom of Job . . . the greatness of Job . . . the wealth of Job . . . no, would you notice what James assumed was paramount in people’s minds whenever they thought about Job—*you have heard of the endurance of Job.*

James expected his audience to be familiar with Job’s testimony; he doesn’t provide any information at all.

In fact, this text is the only place where Job is directly mentioned in the entire New Testament.^v

Why? Because he didn’t matter? No, because everybody already knew about him.

You could translate this text—you have already heard and you are still hearing about the endurance of Job.

His testimony begins with all the reasons why the average Christian would assume Job would be the last person on the planet to undergo such suffering. He was a man of integrity. He was a man of morality. He was a man of honesty—the text says he was upright.

The Hebrew word *yashar* refers to a straight path or a level road.

In other words, watch Job's footprints and none of them stray off the path. There's nothing crooked about Job's walk.

While he would have been one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in his region, he was honest and upright. His handshake was as good as a contract and a signature.

He didn't buy into his culture and ours that says, if you're on top of the world, you can make up the rules or break them to get your way. Not Job!

Fast forward the tape as God allows Satan to test the faith of Job and you find Job stripped of everything.

One messenger arrives after another until Job hears the news that he's lost his fortune, his businesses, his personnel, and last of all, the most devastating blow of all, the final messenger arrives to tell Job that a tornado touched down where all of his children were eating dinner together and all of them were killed.

If you read the reports from those messengers as they arrived and interrupted each other, one after another without any pause, just as the Bible records it happened, it took just about 39 seconds for Job's world to be turned upside down. In just 39 seconds he learned that he'd lost everything.

He fell to the ground . . . some time later, we're not told how long, he got up and tore his robe which signified a broken heart; he shaved his head, signifying humility and then fell back to the ground and worshipped. And he said, "***Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return . . . the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1:20-21)***

Satan goes back to God and gains permission to turn the thermostat up even higher.

Fast forward the tape and you find Job with skin ulcers all over his body. He can't stand without pain and can't sit without discomfort. If you track through the book of Job, you discover his physical sufferings included:

- Persistent itching (2:8)
- An inability to eat (3:24)
- A overwhelming sense of dread (3:25)
- Insomnia (7:4)
- Hardened skin that cracked and oozed with pus (7:5)
- Difficulty breathing (9:18)
- Dark circles under his eyes which made him appear demented – in fact, when his friends arrive they don't recognize him (16:16)
- Dramatic loss of weight (19:20)
- Constant internal pain (30:17)

And by the way, he's moved out of the house and he's now living at the town dump. Chapter 2 informs us he's ***sitting among the ashes. (2:8)***

Towns in the Middle East had a landfill, a city dump outside the gates where garbage was taken and periodically burned for sanitation purposes.^{vi}

To be sitting among the ashes was to be sitting at the landfill where beggars foraged for scraps of food . . . this was the city's disposal site and perhaps the only comfortable place for Job to sit was on a bed of ashes from some recent fire. His body is broken with pain, and his heart is broken over ten fresh graves.

And there's no voice speaking from heaven; no answers arriving by angelic messenger who reports, "Job . . . listen, Satan is testing your faith in God. God is allowing him to test you like this . . . God hasn't abandoned you . . . He plans to bless you!"

Not one word and Job is anything but patient.

Make sure you don't misread James. James does not write, "Remember the patience of Job." And he definitely doesn't write, "Remember the silence of Job."

Not hardly. Job will demand an audience with God to argue his integrity. This isn't supposed to happen. Where have you been?

Yet through it all he endured in his faith in the one true and living God.

Even through this dark valley you could trace the footprints of faith. They would suddenly surface from the inner resolve of this patriarch who was suffering.

- Job would say, "***I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last He shall take His stand on the earth. (Job 19:25)***
- He would believe, "***God knows the way I take and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)***

- Job would say by gut level faith *in chapter 13, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.” (Job 13:15)*

Endurance means you are willing to wait.

Endurance means you are willing to worship while you wait.

Endurance means you are continuing to walk in faith while you worship while you wait.

You don’t understand the trial; you can’t explain it; you feel you don’t deserve it; you certainly didn’t expect it . . . and worst of all, you can’t escape it.

God wants you to develop endurance as you go through it.

I remember reading one particular account where a quadriplegic had given up . . . he was serving as a pastor but then had an accident with paralyzed him from the neck down. He had reached a point where he no longer wanted to get out of bed; he wanted the lights turned out and the world to go away. Out of desperation, his wife wrote Joni and said, he’s lost sight of the path . . . we need help.

Joni called him and would later write about the conversation. Let me quote her words, “I tracked Pastor Ron and his wife Beverly down and gave them a call.

Beverly answered the phone and after I talked and prayed with her I asked if I could talk to Ron. She knocked on his door and he let her tuck the phone under his ear. Although he would not respond, I talked a little bit of shop about quadriplegia. I wanted to move beyond these topics and so I started to share favorite scriptures that sustained me through the toughest of times. There was only silence on the other end. I even sang. Still no response.

Finally, I did the only thing I could think of that I hadn’t already tried. I asked Ron if he’d ever seen a particular movie that included some poignant suffering and he actually responded, “Yes, I have.” “Well, Ron, do you remember what was in that letter

when it was found?” Ron said, “Yes . . . it said, ‘Hope is a good thing and no good thing ever dies.’”

Joni then said to him, “Ron, right now there are 10,000 quadriplegics like you and me across America and all of them were lying in bed this morning wondering whether or not they should get busy living or get busy dying. Ron, I’m going to make a choice to get busy living. Do you want to join me today?” And Ron said, “Yes, ma’am . . . yes . . . I do.” The last Joni heard was that Ron and Beverly were active in sharing their testimony to everyone, preaching wherever the invitation came.^{vii}

The Apostle Peter—who matured greatly in this matter of endurance—you remember he caved in instead of standing up in front of a servant girl at a campfire early on.

Now, as old man, Peter would write these wonderful words, ***“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator, [He will do] what is right.” (1 Peter 4:19)***

That word *entrust* is a banking term which means to deposit treasure for safe keeping.

When you deposit money into your bank, there is insurance to cover your money, the FDIC supposedly insures up to 100,000 dollars. I’ve never had to put that to the test.

Peter writes—you *can deposit your life*—your very soul in your Creator. He knows what He’s doing . . . you can trust Him even when the footprints He has you following lead into a deep valley or through the ashes of everything broken and thrown away.

By the way, this is the same word used by our Lord when He said from the cross, ***“Father, into Thy hands I ‘entrust’ my Spirit.” (Luke 23:46)***

In the hour of His greatest suffering, Jesus Christ entrusted everything to His Father, and so can we.

These are the footprints of our Prince and His prophets and a patriarch from long ago . . . let’s follow their footprints . . . and learn how to endure.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 05/08/2011 by Stephen Davey.

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