

October 31, 2010 - Endurance

Good morning everyone. This morning we are going to continue our series on Snapshots. Looking at different characteristics or character traits that we need to have in our life to get through life and not just get through it but get through it in a good way and in a rich full way as God has promised us. And so, these are things that not only do we need but things that God has promised that He is going to supply us with as we journey through life. And so, this morning the Snapshot we are on is "Endurance". Sometimes when it comes to certain topics I struggle to find a text out of the Bible that really fits where we're going with the topic but this week I was blessed it was really easy. I thought "Endurance" what are we going to talk about in endurance and immediately, I knew the exact scripture I want to talk about. It comes out of Acts Chapter 20. Let's read it together". Acts 20:7-12

"On the first day of the week they came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and because he intended to leave the next day, he kept talking until midnight. And there were many lamps in the upstairs room where they were meeting and seated in the window was a young man named Eutychus who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on and on. And when he was sound asleep he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man put his arms around them "Do not be alarmed" he said, "he's alive" and he went upstairs and broke bread and ate and after talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted."

So I thought, what better passage for us to look at this morning. Brad called me and said "would it be all right if we put the sermon a little earlier in the service" and I said "that's perfect, all the more time" and we can just kind of go from there. And so, I'm going to do a little object lesson here this morning and then see how long you folks can endure as we go through our sermon. I thought "Oh that's probably not going to go over so well". And so, I kind of changed my thought there a little bit and thought we'd go with a different angle on things this morning.

When we talk about endurance and we talk about this ability to keep going even when you feel like that's the last thing you want to do, there are several famous quotes that come up and probably one of the most famous comes from Winston Churchill. In 1941 after the worst of the bombing and the German attack was over and things were starting to turn the corner for Britain, Churchill was at a school and he gave this speech and he said :

After this period of ten months that we have endured and gone through, he said, this is the lesson that we should learn from all of that. "Never give in. Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in. Except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to apparently overwhelming might of the enemy".

That famous speech inspires many people.

Back in the '80's I remember we were at the old building and we did this series and I would say it was a video series, but I kind of think it was before video came along. I think we actually watched this on the reel-to-reel projector. "The Heart of the Fighter" series, I don't know if any of you remember. To be honest with you, I don't remember anything about it, except for one thing. And the one thing I remember is the little catchy theme song that played at the beginning while they showed this animation. And really, the only part of the theme song I remember is this one section. And I'm going to share it with you and if you remember it, which I can see several of you do, I want you to join in with me as a part of the song that just won't get out of my head is "Never, never, never, never, never, never give up....." And every week, you heard that song, over and over and over, again. And as I thought of those things, I thought, you know those are great and those are inspiring, but to some extent you know, when you're in certain situations, it doesn't matter how many times you say "never", you still feel like giving up and it doesn't matter how many cute posters of kitties hanging from branches, that you look at, right? All those slogans all those clichés that people give to us, like you know "hang in there" or "never give up" "never surrender" never say die" "don't quit" "keep on keeping on", all of those things which are good and which are meaningful on one level, when you are in the thick of things, when you are ready to just throw in the towel, all of those things seem a little shallow and a little empty.

I was reading a book this week. I read a whole chapter and the whole chapter was on "ENDURANCE" and I'm going to sum up the entire chapter of this book in two sentences. Maybe one run-on sentence, I'm not sure. Here's the whole chapter summed up: "Endurance is when you keep going when you want to quit. To have endurance in your life, keep going when you want to quit."

I thought, "that's true, but that doesn't really sustain me, in those really low moments. In those moments when I want to quit. That's not going to pull me through. And so, this morning, I thought, I want to hear some voices that give me some real hope for those moments. I want to hear some voices that say "I've been through the dark spots, I've been through the low spots and I came out the other side. And I'm not saying I have all the answers but here is what my journey was." And so, I asked a few friends if they would share with us this morning, a few of their thoughts and experiences as they have gone through life and a few of the things they have learned about endurance and not giving up, and particularly about God sustaining them through that. And so, I'm going to give them a chance to do that, right now and first person I'm going to call on is Dana Schneider and he's going to come up and share for a few minutes, about his journey.

Dana Speaks: I don't know if this is good or not, but it doesn't really matter much what I've got written down. When I think of endurance, I think about running in a race, getting on your bicycle and racing down a hill. But the truth is that all of us are in a race of one kind or another be it a bicycle race, a marathon or the fight with the devil which is our purpose of getting to heaven. As we all note there's going to be a bump in those roads, it seems like sometimes

nothing goes smoothly. Some of you know that I've had a few bumps in my road lately. Whether the bump in the road is in our Christian life or in our physical life, we can treat them somewhat the same way. So what do we do when we hit that bump and it puts us down? I think the key is to not let that bump keep us down. Get back on that bike and continue the race.

Firstly, in my case, I directed my thoughts at positive thinking. You can have that positive thinking by trusting in the Lord. Trusting that He is going to take care of you. He is, ultimately, the one who is in control.

Secondly, I have always tried to remember that there are individuals that have it worse off than I do. So, try to find a way to be grateful that things aren't worse than they are for you. Don't let that bump in the road keep you down.

Jennifer Wallace speaks: I'll take up some of Dana's time. Tomorrow and the next day marks a difficult anniversary for us, but one that we treasure as well. Our son, Gordon, was born November 2nd. There are many things that sustained us, but for me, the words are really important and so, I had a blog and I had 19 pages I wanted to print off today and I can't express this enough but we think that our memorizing scriptures is kind of a cute thing that we do with our kids or whatever. I can't tell you how important that is, because things just flooded me, the scriptures, things just came at us and it was amazing. So words were really important. And people, I look out and I see the people who helped sustain us. It's amazing. The prayer. We didn't even know how many people were praying for us at that time. It was pretty unbelievable.

So I'm going to read you some things from the Blog because, I'm not where I was then. And I'm so grateful for that. Looking back it was pretty amazing the words that came out of me, even. I didn't even know how that happens, but I know that the spirit was providing that. Our son, Gordon, had two rooms ready, one with the words written on the wall that said "everlasting" and "praise". And the other, the room that Gordon occupies now is truly the place of everlasting praise. I don't know why I chose those words specifically, but that's where he is and that's who he is. We are all on a journey in which our lives are to be an everlasting praise of God. It is sometimes the hardest thing to do and to be. Often times I don't feel like praising. Often times my thoughts are very earth-bound in the here and now. While I am grateful for the peace and calm of the nursery now, (I'm talking about then). I want a room that will be noisy with my babies' cries. That is what life in this world is about, joy and pain. Don't get me wrong, if I could have this cup of pain pass from me, I would let it go. Instead, it is my will I will have to let go of. What can I hang on to? What is this cup? At times the cup is bitter sweet but Oh! It can be beautiful too. It is the cup of communion that we all share in. It is the cup of everlasting praise. Another part:

We have experienced loss, one that will forever affect us but after Gordon's death, the greater loss and the greater tragedy will be losing these three things: Faith, Hope and Love. I don't want to imagine how tragic that would be and how lost we would be. The Spirit moves in ways

that are unknown to me. I am glad that he is working. The song that hit me this morning, in Church, was “Before the throne of God above”. The part of the verse that always gets me is, “To look on Him and pardon me”. Today that same verse hit me a little sooner. I never really thought about “When Satan tempts me to despair” making sense. I never thought that despairing could be a temptation. I understand that now. Last night John and I spoke about how Heaven was a theoretical place, before Gordon, we always knew it existed and we did want to see certain people again but we never truly longed to see it and be there. We do now. I believe that the Spirit orchestrated another meeting today and that was, I met up with another mom who experienced losing her son around the same time. So much of the Bible was written as hearts cried out to their sorrow to God. David knew this. Jesus knew this too. He wept. Those upbeat hymns about heaven, what are they really about? Will we be able to contain ourselves. Our laughter, our tears, when we see those most precious to us. I know I won’t.

And I want to read this about the superpowers. On Halloween so many dress up as super heroes. This is something that came up. As the wife of a self-proclaimed geek, it is good for me to be able to discuss topics like “If I would be able to have a super power, what would I choose?” It also seems like a nice break from life right now. Those who are contemplating super powers, I came up with one although it’s probably been done before, the ability to interpret language, coded or not. There is a reason for the Tower of Babal, that it didn’t get finished. Time travel. The ability to go back and forth and possibly change events has come up in discussions as well. Ah yes! What I would give. It is so key that I do not spend too much time dwelling on this. This could be SO destructive. Wouldn’t it be good to save the world from certain painful events? Wouldn’t it be good to be able to save ourselves from the hurt of losing Gordon? I have said it before, that there is a reason we cannot see the future. Just as there is a reason why we cannot change the past. I would love to go back so I could have my son, here and now and to hold him and feed him. I would do it if I could but those vows that I’ve come to know, the compassion from those parents of those who have lost and names I’ve known, I would not have experienced. I would not have experienced the love and covering of prayers that I have received from our families, from our Church, our co-workers our friends and friends of friends. I would not have received the compassion that I did from men and women who saw us through that difficult delivery in the hospital and I would not have felt how powerful our marriage vows can truly be. Without painful events in the world, we wouldn’t know the likes of Kory Tenboom, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr. We wouldn’t see God in our darkest hours. His own Son, powerful beyond what we can imagine, would not have come. And still, I would trade. Oh yes, human. And yet, there are greater powers that are available. Peace that passes understanding. The ability to forgive. Profound joy. Faith Hope and Love. Jer. 29: 11-14:

“For I know the plans I have for you , declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find Me. And when you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you”.

I could go on, but I'm not going to. (End of Jennifer's talk).

Thanks Jennifer. And I know that those are just a handful, a sampling, of the stories that are sitting in this audience this morning. Stories of enduring through very difficult times. And I think when we share those with each other, it gives us strength to know that we are not alone. So I thank Jen and Dana for doing that with us this morning.

The idea of endurance. You know it's funny, every week as I prepare my lesson, even on our sermon survey site, there's a question that's on there every week and it lists all of the character traits we've gone through, so far, and it says "Which of these do you think if the most difficult to develop in your life and which is perhaps the easiest?" And you get to rate those on there. Every week, it seems like I get to the new topic and say "you know what, I think this one is tops, I think this one, if not most difficult, is most important,". And I think, "If not for this one, all of the other one's fall apart". And when I think of endurance, I think that is so true. I think endurance just touches every area of our life. There is no area of your life where you're not going to need some endurance. There is no area of your life, where at some point, you're not going to feel like "I just want to give up on this, or in this". And if there is an area in your life when you haven't felt that way, you just haven't been doing it long enough yet, I'm convinced. At least that has been my experience, because we always get to that point, being human, we just get to that point where we just feel like "you know what, I can't keep on in this anymore. I can't keep going in this anymore. I am just ready to give this up". And our message this morning is that God knows that that's how life goes. And God knows that you are going to get to those points where you are ready to throw in the towel and you are ready to put your hands up and say "that's it, I'm done with all of it". And God is there standing beside you saying "I want to help you get through to the other side of this".

There's a passage out of Ephesians I want to share with you this morning and I think it's those kind of ideas that Paul has in mind when he is writing those at the end of his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Eph. 6:10-18:

Finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and against the authorities and against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces and evil in the Heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes you will be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand, stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist and the breast plate of righteousness in place and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace and in addition to this, take up the shield of faith which can extinguish all of the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests and with this in mind, be alert and always keep praying for all the saints."

Now, we don't really have time to unpack all of that this morning and look into what all the

different parts of the armour there are, but there are a few quick points that I would like to share with you as I read through that text that jump out at me. Things that we can carry with us when the job that your at gets too stressful. When your relationships get frustrating. When life gets exhausting. Here are some things that God wants you to remember.

First. Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. When you feel like you can't do it, the good news is, you don't have to. God says "my power can carry you through. My power can help you overcome" and you are going to find situations that you cannot endure on your own, but God's power can carry you through to the other side.

Second. Put on the full armour so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground. And obviously, putting on the armour, armour is a defensive thing. Armour is what you put on to protect you. To shield you. To defend you from the attacks. And God says "Put on all of my armour. All of the things that I give you to protect you from the things that are attacking you. Put that on". But Paul reminds us and Jennifer said something similar to this "put it on ahead of time". You don't wait till the bullets are flying to look for your Kevlar vest, do you? No, you put it on ahead of time. Put on the armour ahead of time so that when the day comes and you need it, you are protected. And Jennifer talked about learning memory verses and how she had done all of that ahead of time so that when the moment came, they were there and they flooded back to her. And so likewise we need to put the time, invest the time, in building our relationship with God ahead of time so that when those moments come, when that day comes, when we need His strength and His power by our side, we've already built that connection with Him. And we need to do the same with our brothers and sisters in Christ and the support system that is there. To do it ahead of time, so that when the day comes, we are able to stand. And you may say "that's great, but what if I'm in the thick of things right now?". It's too late to plan ahead, what do I do not? Well, that's the last thing Paul says, he says, "Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" and essentially what he is saying, no matter what is going on, call out to God. No matter what you are struggling with, call out to God. No matter how high or how low you feel in this moment, call out to God and God will listen and God will respond. Like Churchill said in his big quote, "Never give in to things big or small, petty or whatever," he said, it doesn't matter if it's a big thing or a little thing, call out to God, because there is nothing that is too big for God to want to hear about and there is nothing in your life that is too small for God to care about. And then he adds, "keep on praying for all the saints". And this is perhaps one of the greatest weapons that we can actually wield ourselves, to keep on praying for each other. When you have a need let the rest of us know so we can pray about it. We have so many options and we're trying to make more options available for that. We have an E-mail that goes out if there is an urgent prayer request, we send it out by e-mail so everyone can know and start praying about it. Every Sunday after service we have our prayer room. If you have something you need to pray about you can go to that room and someone will pray with you or for you or whatever you need. Wednesday nights in that same room, there's a group of people who meet there every Wednesday night and all they do in that room is pray. So if you have needs that need to get prayed about, let us know and we'll put it in that room and it will get prayed about. Praying for each other is one of the greatest

weapons that we can wield.

I hope this morning that hearing those stories has been encouraging to you and that you know that you are not alone in your struggle and that when you feel like you're ready to throw the towel in, there are others who have been through that. We have people in this congregation who have been through, I would venture to say, almost every kind of struggle that you can imagine. We have someone here who has journeyed through that. Being stuck in a job, that you can't stand. We have people who have endured that. Being stuck not being able to find a job that you want. We have people who have endured that. Being in relationships that are just driving you nuts. We have people who have endured that. Sickness of all kinds. We have people who have endured that. Grief, sometimes far too premature grief. We have people who have endured that. And part of the reason God brings us together, is so that we can share those stories and so that we can gather around each other and say "I've been through it, and God brought me through to the other side and if He could do it for me, he will do it for you.

The writer in Hebrews says: Heb. 12:1-3

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses as throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us".

You guys, are our cloud of witnesses, you are the people who stand by the track and say "you can do it, keep going, keep running, you will reach the end. The writer goes on to say:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross scorning it's shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary".