

Patient Endurance

Mark Mickelson

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When I was in junior high school, I was on the track team. I didn't have a lot of ability but I had enough athleticism to compete; I was also rather lazy. So I chose short events; I did the hurdles, I did the high jump, I did the broad jump, because you could do a burst and then it was over, and you could go rest and then do it again, and that was what I liked to do. Back then, if you had five points through the season you could get your letter and a letter was a big event, if you had a jacket or a sweater. In those days, they actually wore them around and the letters were very fancy, when you got a letter for a sporting event. So, five points meant you had to place in some position, at least five times. First place might be three, third or fourth place, depending on how many were in a race or an activity, you could get down to a single point. Of course during the season you had to accumulate those five points. I had enough athleticism to compete, but being rather lazy, I didn't actually train, so I would pick up a point here and there at a meet, toward the end of the list of whatever would be available; you would get a number three or a number four in placement at a meet, and you would slowly build up.

One day I showed up for a meet and the coach had entered me in the mile run, and I thought, I didn't train in a mile run, I don't run miles (at least I didn't back then), and I just couldn't believe it. A mile was way too much pain for me yet still he put me in there, so I lined up dutifully on the line and we started our run; it was a quarter-mile track. I remember it was about the third lap and the leaders lapped me on the far side, and I was going to have to run a whole lap out there by myself, with the whole crowd watching. I was already hurting—my side hurt and ached. Like I said, I hadn't trained and I didn't like running anyway, at that level. When they lapped me I started to limp a little bit, and then my side hurt more and I had to hold my hand on my side, and I had to look like I was in agony (and actually I was), and finally I slowed down and kind of stopped and walked off the side of the track, where the crowd was, and kind of melted into the crowd and watched the rest of the race from the sidelines.

The coach of course could not believe that I just walked off the track, during the race, and disappeared into the crowd. So after the race was over, I went up to him; he was disgusted and I was justifying myself, how much pain I was in and how terrible it was, and that I tried and did the best I could. He didn't say much. Then he looked at me, finally, and said, "Look, all you had to do was finish. The reason I put you in the mile run was because they were short on participants, and if you had crossed the line, you'd have gotten a point." (One of those five towards my letter that year). "All you had to do was finish. You could have walked across the line and you would have gotten a placement in the race", but I quit.

I always remembered that. "All you had to do was finish." You know I didn't get my letter that year—didn't get it. I don't remember if I was one short or two short, all I know

is I didn't get my letter. Then life went on and you go to work, and you do things that take up your time in other ways. All you had to do was continue the race at whatever pace you could manage and you would place. I eventually learned in the course of my life that you could do some incredible things, if you just refused to quit. If you're willing to just go one step, one placement of your foot at a time.

The year 1976 was the bicentennial of this country and they had what they call the bike centennial which was a coast-to-coast ride from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and we had a team with close to 100 people with support staff, riding in teams across the country, and we started out with our back wheel in the Pacific Ocean and then we were going to put our front wheel in the Atlantic—4,300 miles. There were good days, there were bad days, there were sick days, there were healthy days, hard days, easy days, some days the wind blew, and some days it was just stifling, sweltering hot. I remember we called Missouri the state of misery—we all got sick and as far as I remember the name of that state is misery, but we pedaled. You know what, you start at the Pacific Ocean and you pedal around, one revolution and then one more and then one more, some day you will end up on the other side. We did, the team finished—I think every single person who started finished. Some were busted up a bit in between, we put them back on a bike, and pushed them across the line at the end. It is amazing what you can do one step at a time. You just keep going. It's a matter of how it feels, it's not a matter of whether it's a good or bad day, it's a matter of, I will continue.

Ecclesiastes 7:13 gives a reference to God and the way He works with us, and how His creation has been established.

Ecclesiastes 7:13 *Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?*

14) *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.* (NKJV)

The NLT says nothing is certain in this life. There are going to be good days, there are going to be bad days; consider that God has appointed them all. Now, He's not appointed everything that takes place except that He has allowed it to, but He has appointed for us times of trials and times of rejoicing, and we're supposed to walk through them and continue. All you have to do is finish—finish obviously in faithfulness.

There are a number of passages in the New Testament that talk about the end times, prophecies of the end times. Three of those chapters are Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, but I want to go to Matthew 10 because it's the same point, but it's in a little different context and it's just a place that I would rather read this example from. Matthew 10, starting in verse 16.

Matthew 10:16 *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*

17) *But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.*

18) *You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*

19) *But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;*

20) *for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

21) *“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.*

22) *And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. (NKJV)*

So what’s the answer? What’s the answer to persecution? What’s the answer to accusation? What’s the answer to being cast out of the synagogue? What’s the answer to your friends or family turning against you? He who endures to the end will be saved. Okay, today is a bad day, maybe tomorrow will be better. Take another step, continue on your way.

23) *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (NKJV)*

The reason I wanted to read Matthew 10 is because the context of prophecy in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 contains the same statement, with a little different story flow, but I now want to look at Luke 21, because all of those passages, prophetically, are parallel—the three in particular. Luke 21:8 tells the story and then gives a little different answer to enduring to the end; it puts it in a different set of words that I think clarifies for us what step by step should ultimately be.

Luke 21:8 *And He said: “Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them.*

9) *But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.” (NKJV)*

It is going to play out one day and it will take some time, and you’re going to have to walk through it. I’ll walk through it, step by step. You’re not going to know what each day will bring. God says, don’t be worried, trust Me.

10) *Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*

11) *And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.*

12) *But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. (NKJV)*

We think suffering is having a limited supply of toilet paper. This is serious.

12 continued) ... *You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.*

13) *But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.* (NKJV)

God says, I will use you for My good will, My purpose.

14) *Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer;*

15) *for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.*

16) *You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends;*
(NKJV)

I don't have to worry about being betrayed by too many friends; I don't have many. There are only a few left that have even the opportunity.

16 continued) ... *and they will put some of you to death.*

17) *And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.*

18) *But not a hair of your head shall be lost.* (NKJV)

Then it says, instead of endure to the end,

19) *By your patience possess your souls.* (NKJV)

Same passage, same statement, now worded in a different way: *By your patience possess your souls.* That's interesting—patient endurance is the point. When you endure—we're not talking about gritting your teeth (I can do that)—we're talking about loving your brother, returning kindness for insult, showing love in place of persecution. Think about a marriage. What kind of marriage do you think you might have when you get to the point where you say, I'm just going to put up with you. That's all, I'm just going to grit my teeth and ride this one out. You have no marriage and you will have no marriage. You are to love your mate, not just put up with him or her. It's a totally different response.

Hebrews 6:9, referencing again those who are faithful in their service.

Hebrews 6:9 *But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.*

10) *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name ...* (NKJV)

He's not going to set this fact aside, that we have striven to respond to His call and been faithful.

10 continued) ... *in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister* [do continue in your service].

11) *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, [same point]*

12) *that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (NKJV)*

Endurance and patience, unto the end, and you inherit the promise. So it's the same passage, again now just connecting those two concepts together. As I said, there are two ways we can look at endurance—you can grit your teeth and tough it out or you can exercise patient continuance in doing good, and that is indeed the point of this sermon; Romans 2—patient continuance in doing good is the same as enduring to the end, but it's put in a terminology that quite frankly is better for us to understand. Romans 2:6. I'm breaking into the sentence here.

Romans 2:6 *who "will render to each one according to his deeds":*

7) *eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;*

8) *but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,*

9) *tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;*

10) *but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

11) *For there is no partiality with God. (NKJV)*

God is doing this only one way. One of the great examples of that, I believe, is in Acts 16. I've thought of this and I've tried to imagine myself in similar circumstances, and, I'm afraid, at least at some level, I might well come up short. I hope I don't come up short in the end. I process the way this plays out and what the approach is.

Acts 16:16 *Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.*

17) *This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."*

18) *And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.*

19) *But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.*

20) *And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;*

21) *and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."*

22) *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.*

23) *And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.*

24) *Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (NKJV)*

So they've been mocked, reviled, beaten, had their clothes ripped and shredded, and then are thrown into the very inner core of the prison; now they are in stocks, which would not be very comfortable, quite frankly.

25) *But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (NKJV)*

Instead of crying out, what have you done to us, they were literally praising God, singing hymns of praise.

26) *Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.*

27) *And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.*

28) *But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."*

29) *Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.*

30) *And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (NKJV)*

Obviously the miraculous events got his attention, but I would not deny that the miraculous behavior of his prisoners got his attention as well, otherwise he would just have said, I guess we're all out of here.

31) *So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ... (NKJV)*

Isn't that interesting? We're believers, we're not doubters, we're not schemers, we're tolerators—we're believers. It's a positive statement about our attitude and approach.

31 continued) *... and you will be saved, you and your household."*

32) *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*

33) *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

34) *Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. (NKJV)*

I just think that is an amazing example; someone beats you, throws you in prison, you're in misery (misery is what you're in), and you're praising God, and God intervenes and uses you to fulfill His good will. What is it then that weakens our patient endurance? What weakens our patience? Impatience would be a start—that weakens our patience, as do offenses, injustice.

Ecclesiastes 7; we'll go back to the book of Ecclesiastes—honestly, it's my favorite book. To me it's like hardboiled life, right on the bones—just right there in front, and it's just so real to me. My cousin was in the hospital one time, with some very serious health issue that was going to cost him his career; it was very painful and he was laying there in his bed, and I called him. He wasn't a religious man particularly—his wife was, that's who I came into the church through. He said, Mark, what do you think I should do? I said, I think you need to read the book of Ecclesiastes, so he did, and he said, I liked that, it was good. He thought about it and quite frankly, God was working with him.

Ecclesiastes 7:21 *Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.*

22) *For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.* (NKJV)

That is true. The fact is that at some point in time, we are going to have to simply ignore the fact that certain things have been said, or certain things that have been done, or certain injustices have been dealt, and we're going to have to go on and just let it be—walk away. If you don't, if I don't, then the point will come that we will trip, because it's too much to carry and we're going to stumble, and when the Bible talks about stumbling, it's talking about failing spiritually—getting tripped up. There are some things that are simply too much weight to carry. The offenses and the injustices that we sometimes suffer, we have to learn to walk away. Set them down, take a step, and continue on our way. Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph here. It's been interesting to me to read this at times.

Psalm 73:1 *Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.*

2) *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;*

He's not talking about stubbing his toe, he's talking about his walk. He was almost tripped up.

2 continued) *... My steps had nearly slipped.*

3) *For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

4) *For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.*

5) *They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.*

6) *Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.*

(NKJV)

I can hardly watch the news; I almost have to leave the room—I'm yelling at the television and it's not helpful.

- 7) *Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish.*
- 8) *They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily.*
- 9) *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.* (NKJV)

You know what? If that's what you focus on and that's what you think about, that's a weight that's a little too much to carry, and Asaph is saying, I almost tripped up. I started focusing on the injustice, on the offenses, on the corruption, and that began to fill my mind and it almost took me on its way. Verse 16.

- 16) *When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—*
- 17) *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.* (NKJV)

Until you put that into perspective it was just almost too much. We're going to have to put the burdens down and keep walking the way that God has called us to serve.

The Golden Gate Bridge—everyone on the West Coast has probably been across it in their life at some point, if you're on this end of the country. It's 9,000 feet long—a mile and two-thirds—a massive, massive suspension bridge. It has two cables that support that bridge, that run up over the top all the way, suspending that bridge. There are 27,500 strands of wire in each cable and if you google that, you'll see a picture of a piece and it's *this* big; it's three feet of cable, with 27,500 strands running across the top of that bridge, carrying 36 million pounds. About 14,000 to 15,000 cars could stack up on there and it would hold them all up. If every single one of us in this life laid one strand a day, we could build that cable. We could build that same cable in our lifetime. Seventy-five years—you have to give yourself seventy-five, you can't go out prematurely—and if you lay a strand a day, you could build that cable. That's what we're doing. Everyday we lay one strand for the day, tomorrow you lay another one—you lay it until your job is done and you've got the cable that God builds in us spiritually. Patient continuance in good works. That's a lot of patience.

One time when I was working in construction, they had a problem with the rebar that was coming in—they weren't sure they were getting all of their allotment—so an entire truck of rebar came in, and they came up to me and handed me an invoice and some black-tip markers. Mark, I want you to go out there and confirm that we got the load; not the bundles, the pieces. There were 15,000 pieces of rebar on the back of that truck and they had laid it down on the ground, and I went out there in the New Mexico sun, with my little marker and that sheet, and I counted every single one. You know what, if you count one, then you count two, then you count three, eventually you get to 15,000—you get there. It's like going across the country, it's like walking on your way.

I'm always shocked when backpacking; you end up at one end of this big valley—long valley—you're at the base of a large mountain and you take a step, another step, and at some point in time you're looking back from the other side. It shocks me that you could literally just walk or climb all the way and end up at the top. In mountaineering you start

out hiking in on a trail and you are moving fairly well, then you start climbing steeper sections and you're slowing down, and then you're under some rocks and you're stepping up. If it's alpine, eventually you end up in the snow, and then you just go straight up the snow, you don't zigzag, you just go straight up like a ladder, and eventually you're doing what they call a rest step—you kick your toe into the snow, stiffen the leg as you step up and put your weight on one leg, even to the point of taking a breath in between each step. You just keep doing it and you end up on top. If you don't get sick or hurt, if you continue, you end up on top. It amazes me—it works; this life is God's calling for us to patiently continue in good works, every single day. If you finish, it counts. In continuance, if you finish, it counts. 1 Corinthians 15:50.

1 Corinthians 15:50 *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.*

51) *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—*

52) *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

53) *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

54) *So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

55) *"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"*

56) *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*

57) *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

58) *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [patiently continuing in good works], knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (NKJV)*

Your labor can be in vain if that's all it is—just labor—if all you're doing is counting up activity. But if it's in the Lord, it will not be in vain. I wish I had learned that a little sooner but I guess we learn it in time. We begin to build our cable, we begin to lay those strands on there.

Sometimes when I read the Bible, I want to go to 2 Chronicles 29 here, and I want to explain why I'm going to 2 Chronicles 29. The Bible isn't written in such a way that every story is complete in each context. Sometimes part of the story is in Chronicles, sometimes part of the story is in Kings, and then we don't always keep in mind who is the player, who's gone, who's still in place and who's missing. Is Israel there or is Israel in captivity, because in the chapter before, Israel is mentioned, and then all of a sudden they're not there anymore. It's hard to keep track of the flow, so I want to give you a couple of examples from the life of Hezekiah; I want to read to you two different parts of his story, and the stories are different. They are the same story but they add different elements to it. It's fascinating to read about him from two different sources.

2 Chronicles 29:1 *Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah.*

2) And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. (NKJV)

So he was a good king.

3) In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.

4) Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square,

5) and said to them: "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. (NKJV)

Pretty amazing, if you think about it. It had just all been set aside in a trash heap—dung heap, almost as such—put in the holy place.

6) For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and turned their backs on Him. (NKJV)

Are God's people consistent or what? What's the price?

7) They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

8) Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes.

9) For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity.

10) "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us.

11) My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense." (NKJV)

So what are we going to say? Hezekiah is dedicating his life to God, he's going to put God first, he's going to trust God, he's going to restore temple worship. The story plays out and we really appreciate the example that is given. But the true story is, we all have moments of zeal and we all have moments of doubt. It goes back to Ecclesiastes. There are times of wonder and excitement, and there are times of adversity; there are times of rejoicing and there are times of sorrow. God gives them to us all. We don't cry out and ask God, why me, during the blessings. We cry out and ask God, why me, during the trials. Continuing on to 2 Chronicles 30:1 then.

2 Chronicles 30:1 *And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah ... (NKJV)*

Israel and Judah, here, and Israel is already in captivity—they're gone—not a long time but they are gone. Judah is still there but there are remnants, there are people scattered, there are people in the land who were left.

1 continued) *... and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel.*

2) *For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month.*

3) *For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem.*

4) *And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly.*

5) *So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner.*

6) *Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: "Children of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.*

Again, Israel is gone; this is actually the scattered remnant of the people in the land.

7) *And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see.*

8) *Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you.*

9) *For if you return to the LORD, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him." (NKJV)*

Keep walking, take one more step—patient continuance in doing good. In 2 Chronicles, chapter 31, we have in verse 1, Hezekiah cleansing the land of idols and idolatry.

2 Chronicles 31:1 *Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars—from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh—until they had utterly destroyed them*

all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession. [Those who remained.] (NKJV)

Verse 20.

20) Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God.

21) And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered. (NKJV)

In 2 Chronicles 32, Sennacherib comes up against Hezekiah and threatens the land.

2 Chronicles 32:1 *After these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself.*

2) And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem,

3) he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him.

4) Thus many people gathered together who stopped all the springs and the brook that ran through the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?"

5) And he strengthened himself, built up all the wall that was broken, raised it up to the towers, and built another wall outside; also he repaired the Millo in the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance.

6) Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement, saying,

7) Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him.

8) With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (NKJV)

The impression is, if you just stay with Hezekiah, he'll do the right thing; you'll be restored with God because you're going to do the right thing, and then God will turn and bless you. The story goes on then with Sennacherib's defeat and his death, according to God's intervention, and in 2 Chronicles 32:22, we kind of have what is close to the end of the story.

2 Chronicles 32:22 *Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side.*

23) And many brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter. (NKJV)

Well, that's a very nice story. Let's read it in 2 Kings because it's amazing; we don't always read the accounts that match and we don't always get the whole story. There are good times and there are bad times. There are hard times and easy times, and we have to walk through them all, the same way. We walk through the difficulties the same way we walk through the blessings and the opportunities—we do not change. 2 Kings 18:1; be patient with me; I'll try to walk through this with a little less material, telling the same story, but I'll add what's in this book compared to what we just read.

2 Kings 18:1 *Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.*

2) *He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. [Same story, same facts.] His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah.*

3) *And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.*

4) *He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.*

5) *He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.*

6) *For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.*

7) *The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.*

8) *He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city. (NKJV)*

Now go down to verse 13.

13) *And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. (NKJV)*

This is not the same story, this is another part of the story that sometimes we neglect to consider.

14) *Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; [excuse me, Mr. Sennacherib, can we make a deal here?] turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay." And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.*

15) *So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD [he looted the treasury of the temple] and in the treasuries of the king's house.*

16) *At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD [not pleasing to God] and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (NKJV)*

A slightly different story here but that's not enough. When you submit to a bully, does he then like you? No, he will pick on you ever the more. When you give in to Satan, he will simply expand his reach; it will never end.

17) *Then the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they went and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, which was on the highway to the Fuller's Field.*

18) *And when they had called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to them.*

19) *Then the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust?"*

20) *You speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?"*

21) *Now look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, [alliances now—he's actually making some kind of an alliance so that he can be saved by somebody else's army] on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.*

22) *But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?'"*

23) *Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master ... (NKJV)*

The ante just got raised. Here's what I want. All right, I'm going to give it to you; leave me alone. Since you gave that to me, let's double down—I'll take that and more again.

23 repeated) *Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them!*

24) *How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen?*

25) *Have I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'" (NKJV)*

So we have now the terms that have been increased and new conditions are being set. Verse 28.

28) *Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and spoke, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!*

29) *Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand;*
30) *nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." '*
31) *Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree [just go back to your property and your land and you'll be at peace], and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern;*
32) *until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die. But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us."*
33) *Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? (NKJV)*

It continues on, and in verse 36, it says,

36) *But the people held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." (NKJV)*

You know what happens then? Hezekiah turns to God. All right, if you're going to just take my money, I would rather have peace, take my money. You want more than that? No, I want your lives and I'm going to take you away. Time to cry out to God. The price just got too high. Egypt is not going to come and save us; we cried out to Egypt, we offered to pay them to come save us. It's an interesting thing. In Chronicles, the story is Hezekiah was pure, righteous, served God, restored temple worship, and always trusted God, and in Kings, there was a little bit of a lapse there in between. When he went back to trusting God and God delivered him, it was after he had already tried to worm his way out of the situation by his own means. You don't think God gave him the choice to make those two decisions and he could have made the same decision each time? He made the right decision in the end, at least in this story as it plays out.

God tests us. If you do what He gave you to do to begin with, then He will give you a little more to do and test you further, because we have no idea the price, the value, the necessity for our testing that is required for God to know our heart, that we will always serve Him; that there will be no more rebellions, no more turning away. It's going to cost you \$10—here's \$10. Actually now we're going to do this, it's going to cost you \$50 this time—here's \$50. This next one costs you \$100—forget it! I paid, I'm done. God says, you are through. It doesn't matter, you finish, you take another step, patient continuance of doing good, you continue. The time comes when you're there—it's at the end. You get there one step at a time. One strand on the cable until the cable is complete. God will give us both of those things to face and we have to walk through them in the same context. Only God can then see our hearts. We think we can read other people—I do. I kind of think I can. Sometimes we can't even see ourselves. Reality is and we have to be careful with that. Psalm 19:12 is interesting in this regard.

Psalm 19:12 *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.*
(NKJV)

Crying out to God to purify us in ways that we personally are not even able to fully see.

13) *Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.*

14) *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.* (NKJV)

We want to be very, very careful; these are crazy times. Sometimes I think the whole world has gone crazy except for you and me, and sometimes I wonder about you. These are crazy times. It is Satan's mind that is being loosed, in the world, in our societies, and frankly, brethren, at times within the body of those who worship God truly. There are crazy things and it's the test, it's the adversity that we walk through in this way. We want to be careful about going to God and crying out for justice, because, before God, it's only by His mercy that we even continue in his service. We deserve to die; we don't want justice, we want mercy. If we want mercy for ourselves then we need to seek mercy for those around us, those who abuse us, those who despise us, those who neglect us, those who cast us aside; let's seek and reach for the same mercy that we seek for God to apply to ourselves.

Over in the book of James, it talks about mercy in comparison to judgment. Brethren, judgment is just not the answer for us. We might think it's the answer for everybody else but it's not how it works—it's going to be the same measure.

James 2:8 *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;*

9) *but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

10) *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

11) *For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.* (NKJV)

If you keep the first commandment but not the fourth commandment, you are guilty of the law. If that bar moves and you don't move with it and put God first, you are guilty of the law.

12) *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.*

13) *For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* (NKJV)

Indeed that is the point. Patient endurance, not grit your teeth, tough it out, grind through the test. Actually rejoice in the test, praise God in the test and return goodness, kindness, for evil, for injustice. That is the test, that's the point. The test is not the test, the test is how we respond to the test—that's the actual test. In the book of Hebrews, in chapter 10, again, it's talking about not wavering, holding on to those things that are true and pure in the way that God has called us to respond to Him.

Hebrews 10:19 *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,*

20) *by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,*

21) *and having a High Priest over the house of God,*

22) *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

23) *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering ... (NKJV)*

One more step. If you have to rest, rest and make one more step.

23 continued) *... for He who promised is faithful.*

24) *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,*

25) *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ... (NKJV)*

That was before the current distress. It's going to be a hard call going forward, brethren; we're going to have to patient there with each other as well.

25 continued) *... as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (NKJV)*

When I was in the army, we used to go out on a run—the whole company would run in formation, over 100 men. The problem was you didn't know how far the run was going to be, so you just ran. You'd run until the DI (the drill instructor) got tired. Well, he never got tired. You would just run and you'd start looking around at the faces to see if anybody was hurting as much as you were, and everybody just kept running, looking at each other because you didn't know where the finish line was. Eventually you would start to lose a few, and they would look around and see if anybody else was going, and when somebody dropped then somebody didn't feel quite as bad; then they could drop, and if enough dropped—I'm going to tell you, you had to do one thing—you had to not look at the people who dropped.

You had to not look at the people who quit because you had to take one more step, and you couldn't see the finish, that was the problem. If you could see that the finish was fifty yards, you could say, I can do fifty yards and I'll be ok, but you didn't know that. So the run was, you just didn't stop, period; you would never stop. You'd get washed out of training if you didn't finish those runs, and it's like God doesn't let us see the finish, we just run. That's the most painful way to do it and quite frankly that's the most troublesome way, mentally, to do it. You can't see the finish.

We can see the Kingdom in our mind, but we can't see when we arrive at that point or that place. So what do we have to do? You have patient continuance in good works, you lay another strand. Tomorrow I'm going to lay one more strand on my cable—I'm going to do that. If it's a good day, I'll do it happily, if it's a bad day, I'll do it with a certain amount of tribulation. Is that a word? Usually if it's in my notes and it's not a word, somebody writes me and says, Mark, that's not a word. Trepidation—tribulation, there you go. But you do it. I go back to junior high school, and all I had to do was finish. I might have had a letter that year. In junior high I could have put it on my sweater and the girls would have flocked around me and followed me through the school. Well, maybe not, but it would have looked good though if it had happened.

We need to keep our focus. Literally, I don't think the focus is on a finish line; conceptually, we can think of a finish line, but you can't see the finish line—you don't know where it is. The focus is to not stop, the focus is to keep moving. Proverbs 4:20.

Proverbs 4:20 *My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.*

21) *Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart;* (NKJV)

Keep your heart open, keep your heart tender, sensitive, so that God can reach it. Do not harden the heart; do not harden the heart in what way? Through injustice, bitterness, frustration, weariness.

22) *For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.*

23) *Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*

24) *Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.*

25) *Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you.*

(NKJV)

Keep your focus on where we are headed.

26) *Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established.*

27) *Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.* (NKJV)

I guess if there is anything I have had to learn and need to learn in this life, it's just to keep moving. It doesn't matter what somebody did, it doesn't matter what somebody said, it doesn't matter what somebody didn't do, or what they didn't say. What God said was, keep moving. Hezekiah is a great example. Read the other account—he compromised, he bought allies, and he paid them off to save himself. When he got into really deep trouble, then he cried out to God. Put a strand on the wire every single day, have patient endurance, patient continuance in doing good.