

SPIRITUAL ENDURANCE

— *Walking Faithfully to the End* —

*“Let us run
with endurance
the race that is set
before us...”*

HEBREWS 12:1

— Fun In Faith Ministry —

FAITH • PERSEVERANCE • FINISH WELL

THE WORKBOOK EDITION

Spiritual Endurance

Walking Faithfully to the End

It is not about finishing first. It is about walking faithfully to the end.

This is the printable companion to the online study. The web edition at fifministry.com/bible-study/spiritual-endurance saves your notes as you type, lets you switch translations, and tracks the thirty-day guide. This edition gives you the same study on paper, with room to write by hand.

How to use this workbook

Read the passage before the teaching, not after it. Write in the spaces — the questions are not rhetorical, and the ones that are hardest to answer are usually the ones worth answering. If you are studying in a group, work one chapter each week and give the case study its own conversation. If you are studying alone, pair each chapter with three days of the field guide at the back.

Scripture

Quotations are from the King James Version, which is in the public domain. The cover renders Hebrews 12:1 in a modern translation; the printed text throughout follows the KJV, which reads “let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Commentary insights summarize Matthew Henry and David Guzik; they serve the study of Scripture and do not replace it.

A pastoral safeguard. Endurance must never be used to shame a struggling believer, to keep someone in a dangerous situation, to discourage medical or professional help, or to treat weakness as sin. Wise Christian care can include prayer, Scripture, pastoral support, medical care, counseling, safety planning, and lawful intervention.

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BEFORE THE FIRST CHAPTER

Introduction: The Long Obedience

Scripture rarely describes the Christian life as a sprint. It calls it a walk, a race run with patience, a course to be finished, a fight to be fought, a field to be tended, a building raised slowly on rock. Every one of those pictures assumes time. None of them rewards a fast start that does not last.

That is worth saying plainly, because much of what surrounds Christians pushes the other way. Testimonies compress years into minutes. Conferences run on intensity. Online ministry rewards what is visible and immediate. It is easy to absorb an unspoken standard in which the mature Christian is the one who changed fastest, felt most, and did most — and to conclude, quietly, that a life of slow and unremarkable faithfulness is a lesser thing.

What endurance is

The New Testament word usually translated patience or endurance means remaining under a weight rather than escaping it. It is not a personality trait, and it is not grim resignation. It is the settled decision of a person who has been given a course to run and intends to be found running it. Scripture treats endurance as evidence that faith is real, not as the means of making it real.

What endurance is not

Endurance is not self-reliance with a Bible verse attached. It is not the refusal to rest, to grieve, or to ask for help. It is not staying in a harmful situation because leaving would look like failure. And it is not a technique for guaranteeing that your life will go well. Paul endured and was still executed. The measure of a finished course is faithfulness, not outcome.

Who keeps you

A book about remaining faithful raises an obvious fear: *what if I do not?* That question is answered in the first chapter rather than left to accumulate, because it deforms everything if it is left unanswered. The short version is this: the God who begins a good work in his people is the one who completes it. Believers are told to endure, and they are told they are kept. Both are true, and the second is what makes the first bearable.

Before you begin, write this down

What do you hope is still true of you in twenty years?

CHAPTER 1 • HEBREWS 12:1-3

The Race We're Actually Running

Endurance, not speed, is the measure of the Christian life — and the God who starts a believer in the race is the one who keeps him in it.

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” — Hebrews 12:1, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you replace speed with faithfulness as the measure of your walk, fix your attention on Christ rather than on the other runners, and rest your assurance on God's keeping rather than on your own performance.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: Hebrews 12:1-3

Opening questions

1. What does this passage tell you to lay aside, and what does it tell you to do?

2. Where is the reader's attention directed, and away from what?

3. What word here describes how the race is to be run?

The other runners are not your competition

DEEPER TEACHING 1

The Christian life is often pictured as a competition, and the picture is half right. Scripture does use athletic language: a race, a course, a prize, a crown. But notice what the writer of Hebrews does not say. He does not say run faster than the others. He does not say arrive first. He says run with patience the race that is set before us — the one marked out for you, not the one marked out for someone else. The word translated patience carries the sense of remaining under a weight rather than throwing it off; it is the stamina of someone who stays. That single word reorganizes everything. If the goal were speed, then the person who learned the Bible quickly, prayed longest, or matured earliest would be winning, and the rest of us would be losing. But the goal is not speed. The goal is to still be walking with Jesus when the road is long and the scenery is unremarkable and nobody is watching. Paul uses the same picture in Acts 20:24 and speaks of finishing his course — his own, not another man's. Hebrews 12 is not a lonely passage. The chapter opens with a great cloud of witnesses and the whole letter is written to a church. There are other runners, and they matter enormously. They are simply not your competitors.

Pause and respond

Whose pace have you been using to measure your own?

Looking unto Jesus**DEEPER TEACHING 2**

The command to run comes with an instruction about where to look. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The word suggests looking away from other things in order to look at one thing. This is not a technique for positive thinking; it is a matter of who supplies the strength for the running. Christ is named as both the author and the finisher — he begins faith and he completes it. Then the writer adds a reason that reaches the tired: consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Weariness is anticipated here, not condemned. The remedy offered to a discouraged believer is not a rebuke and not a new technique, but a long look at a Savior who endured the cross and is now seated. Endurance is sustained by attention. What we look at repeatedly is what forms us, and the runner who watches the other runners will eventually stop running.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry reads the weights of Hebrews 12:1 as an inordinate attachment to the present life, and the besetting sin as the one to which a person is most prone by habit, age, or circumstance. His counsel for weariness is to look steadily at Jesus. [H1]

Pause and respond

What have you been looking at most often, and what has it been doing to your endurance?

Practice: name the weight, then set it down**DEEPER TEACHING 3**

The passage distinguishes between weights and sins. A sin must be repented of. A weight may not be sinful at all — it is simply something that makes the running harder: an overloaded calendar, a resentment kept warm, a commitment taken on to be liked, a hobby that has quietly become a second job, a phone habit that eats every quiet moment. Runners do not compete in overcoats. Start with one. Write down the weight you would defend most quickly if someone questioned it, since that reaction is often a signal. Then decide what setting it down

actually looks like this week — not an intention, an action with a day attached. Tell one person what you have decided, because a weight set down privately is usually picked back up privately.

Pause and respond

Name one weight, and the specific step that sets it down this week.

Key takeaway. Christianity is not a contest of speed; it is a life of remaining with Christ.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

Hebrews 12:1-3	<i>The race is run with patience, with attention fixed on Jesus.</i>
Philippians 1:6	<i>The one who began the good work is the one who completes it.</i>
John 10:27-29	<i>Christ's sheep are held by his hand and the Father's.</i>
1 Corinthians 9:24-27	<i>Paul trains with purpose rather than running aimlessly.</i>
Jude 24-25	<i>God is able to keep his people from falling and present them faultless.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik notes that the word behind race is a term for struggle or conflict, and that Paul in Acts 20:24 speaks of his own race. Each believer has a course to finish, and finishing it takes endurance rather than speed. [G1]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is clearly grounded in the words of Hebrews 12?

2. Does it fit the argument the writer has been making since chapter 11?

3. What pastoral strength does it offer a discouraged reader?

4. What qualification should be kept beside it?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Measuring maturity by visible speed produces pride in the fast and despair in the slow. Both are ways of taking your eyes off Christ.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about God's attitude toward slow growth?

2. Does the claim rest on Scripture or on someone's testimony of rapid change?

3. Would it still be true for a believer with a chronic illness or a demanding job?

4. Does it move me toward Christ or toward measuring myself?

5. Who benefits if I accept it without examination?

A faithful reframe

Endurance, not speed, is the measure of the Christian life — and the God who starts a believer in the race is the one who keeps him in it.

Case study

Ruth has been a Christian for nineteen years. She reads her Bible most mornings, teaches a children's class, prays for her family, and cannot remember the last time she felt anything dramatic while doing any of it.

Last spring a woman named Tessa came to faith through the church's food ministry. Within a year Tessa was giving her testimony on a Sunday evening, leading a study, and describing answered prayers that made the room go quiet. Ruth was glad. Ruth is still glad. But somewhere in the months since, Ruth stopped saying much in her own small group, and she has begun to wonder whether nineteen years of ordinary obedience amounts to anything at all.

Two questions have gotten tangled together in Ruth's mind. The first is whether she is growing. The second is whether God is pleased with her. She is answering the second question with evidence gathered for the first, and she is gathering that evidence by watching Tessa.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice where the reasoning turns, not only where the feeling does.

Work it through

1. What has Ruth actually observed, and what has she concluded beyond what she observed?

2. Which of Ruth's two questions does Hebrews 12:1-2 answer, and which does it not?

3. What would change if Ruth measured the last nineteen years rather than the last nine months?

4. What has Tessa's growth cost Ruth, and why?

5. What would Ruth need to hear said out loud, and who is positioned to say it?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I treated visible progress as evidence of God's favor?

2. What does it change to know that Christ is the finisher of faith and not only its author?

3. What ordinary act of obedience is in front of me today?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What promise about God's keeping should I receive with gratitude?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read Hebrews 12:1-3 aloud twice, in two translations if you have them. Listen first for what the passage says about Jesus, then for what it asks of the runner.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. Where does the language of a race get misused in Christian settings?

3. How does the gospel keep endurance from becoming self-salvation?

4. Who in this church has run a long, quiet, faithful race, and what have we learned from them?

5. What can this group help you practice this week?

Pray together

Pray for those in the group who feel slow, stalled, or unnoticed. Thank God for his keeping, and ask for endurance rather than for a shortcut.

My commitment

Name the weight you identified. Set a day this week to put it down, tell one person, and return to one ordinary practice you had let slip.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, you are the author and the finisher of my faith. Keep my eyes on you when the road is long and the progress is slow. Teach me to run the course you have set for me and not the one I have been watching someone else run. Hold me to the end. Amen.

CHAPTER 2 • MATTHEW 7:13-14

Choosing the Path

Endurance begins with a clear-eyed choice: the narrow way, counted honestly before it is taken and taken again each ordinary day.

“Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” — Matthew 7:14, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you understand what Jesus asks of a follower before the road gets hard, count the cost without either minimizing it or dramatizing it, and see how the narrow way is chosen in small settings rather than at a single ceremony.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: Matthew 7:13-14 • Luke 14:25-33

Opening questions

1. What two ways does Jesus describe, and how are they different?

2. What does Jesus assume about the number of people on each road?

3. What in this passage runs against something you already assume?

Two gates, two roads

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with a series of pairs: two gates, two trees, two builders. The first pair is the most uncomfortable. One gate is wide and one is narrow, and the wide one is not marked as the wicked road. It is simply the easier one, the one with more company. The narrow way is not narrow because God is stingy; it is narrow because it goes somewhere specific. Any road that actually arrives somewhere excludes the destinations it does not go to. Notice also what Jesus does not say. He does not say the narrow way is joyless, or that its travelers are miserable, or that misery is evidence of faithfulness. He says it leads unto life. The difficulty is real, and the destination is worth the difficulty. Much of what wears out believers over decades is not the narrowness of the road but the surprise of finding it narrow, as though a mistake had been made.

Pause and respond

What did you expect the Christian life would be like, and where has the road differed?

Counting the cost before the building begins

DEEPER TEACHING 2

In Luke 14, Jesus turns to great multitudes and does something no promoter would do: he tells them what it will cost. A man who begins a tower without counting is mocked when he cannot finish. A king who marches out without counting sends an embassy asking for terms. Jesus is not discouraging discipleship; he is refusing to gain followers by concealment. This matters enormously for endurance. People do not usually abandon the faith because the cost turned out to be high. They abandon it because the cost turned out to be different from the one they were told about. A believer who was promised health, prosperity, or constant emotional warmth will eventually meet a season none of those promises can survive. A believer who was told the truth — that following Jesus costs everything and is worth everything — has already made room for the hard season before it arrives.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry observes that Christ deals faithfully with those who would follow him, telling them the worst as well as the best, so that no one enters his service under a misunderstanding. [H2]

Pause and respond

Which part of the cost of following Christ were you not told about in advance?

Practice: the path is chosen daily, not annually

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Psalm 1 describes a blessed man by what he walks in, stands in, and sits in — a sequence that moves from passing by, to stopping, to settling. Nobody decides in one dramatic moment to leave the narrow road. The choice is made in small settings: what you do at eleven at night, whose opinion you rearrange your convictions around, which conversation you leave and which you stay in, what you agree to at work when disagreeing would be expensive. The tree in Psalm 1 is planted by rivers of water, and it brings forth fruit in season. Planting is not exciting; it is positional. Endurance is largely a matter of standing where the water is and staying there. This week, identify the one recurring moment where your road quietly narrows or widens, and decide in advance what you will do the next time it comes.

Pause and respond

Where is the daily fork in your road, and what have you been deciding there?

Key takeaway. The narrow way is chosen honestly at the start and re-chosen in ordinary moments no one else sees.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

Matthew 7:13-14	<i>Two gates and two roads, distinguished by where they lead.</i>
Luke 14:25-33	<i>Christ tells prospective disciples the cost before they begin.</i>
Psalms 1:1-3	<i>A settled life is planted, watered, and fruitful in season.</i>
Joshua 24:14-15	<i>A choice is put plainly and answered plainly.</i>
Deuteronomy 30:19-20	<i>Life and death are set before the people, with a call to choose life.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik points out that the crowd is not evidence in either direction. The wide road is identified by where it leads rather than by how many are on it, and the narrow road is found rather than stumbled into. [G2]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. What question was this commentator answering, and does it match the text?

2. Where would a careful reader want more evidence from the passage?

3. What does this insight protect against?

4. What might it underemphasize?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Counting the cost can be twisted two ways: into a gospel of achievement in which the narrow road is walked by human effort, or into a spiritual elitism in which hardship becomes a status.

Test the message

1. Where did this idea come from, and what is it responding to?

2. Does it make the cost of following Christ clearer or heavier than Scripture makes it?

3. Is grace still the ground of my standing in this teaching?

4. Does it make me more honest with myself or more impressive to others?

5. What would I have to ignore in order to keep believing it?

A faithful reframe

Endurance begins with a clear-eyed choice: the narrow way, counted honestly before it is taken and taken again each ordinary day.

Case study

Andre became a Christian in his second year of university, in a season when everything about faith felt vivid. The people around him spoke often about what God was doing, and Andre assumed that was simply what the Christian life sounded like.

He is twenty-nine now. He works in logistics, gets home after seven, and attends church about half the Sundays in a month. Nothing dramatic has gone wrong. When he thinks about it honestly, what he feels is not doubt but disappointment — a low, unspoken sense that he was sold something that has not been delivered, and that the people who sold it to him are still talking the same way.

The tower Andre started building was described to him with a different set of measurements. He did not count this cost, because nobody told him there would be one: years of ordinary obedience with no atmosphere, in a job that does not care, in a city where he has not made a Christian friend since he was twenty-three. He is not deciding to leave the road. He is simply slowing down on it, and he has stopped telling anyone.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what Andre was promised, and by whom.

Work it through

1. What was Andre actually told about the Christian life, and what did he conclude from it?

2. Which of his disappointments are with God, and which are with a description of God he was given?

3. How does Luke 14:28-30 speak to a tower begun with the wrong measurements?

4. What has isolation contributed here that discouragement alone would not have?

5. What is the first concrete step available to Andre this month, and who could take it with him?

Personal reflection

1. Where did I confuse an early season's intensity with the substance of the faith?

2. What have I quietly stopped saying out loud, and why?

3. What would honest counting look like for me right now?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What grace should I receive rather than earn?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read Matthew 7:13-14 and Luke 14:28-30 aloud. Ask the group to listen for what Jesus refuses to hide from those who would follow him.

Discuss

1. What were you told the Christian life would be like, and by whom?

2. Where does our church risk describing the road inaccurately?

3. How can we tell the truth about the cost without making faith sound joyless?

4. What does counting the cost look like for someone already twenty years in?

5. What can this group help you practice this week?

Pray together

Pray for anyone in the group who is disappointed rather than doubting. Ask God for honesty about the road and gladness about the destination.

My commitment

Name the recurring moment where your road narrows or widens. Decide now what you will do the next time it comes, and tell one person the decision.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, you told us the truth about the road before you asked us to walk it. Keep me from expecting a way you never promised. Give me honesty about the cost, gladness about the destination, and grace for the ordinary steps in between. Amen.

CHAPTER 3 • PSALM 13

When Progress Feels Slow and God Feels Absent

Delay is not abandonment; lament is a form of faith, and growth too slow to see is still growth.

“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever?” — Psalm 13:1, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you find biblical words for a season that feels empty, distinguish God’s delay from God’s absence, and measure spiritual growth over years instead of days.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: Psalm 13 • Isaiah 40:27-31

Opening questions

1. How many times does the psalmist ask ‘how long’, and what does he ask for?

2. Where does the psalm end, and how did it get there?

3. What does it tell you that this prayer is in the Bible at all?

God gave his people words for this

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Psalm 13 opens with a complaint aimed directly at God and repeated four times: how long. There is no apology attached, no preface explaining that the psalmist knows he should feel differently. This is worth sitting with, because many believers in a dry season conclude that the dryness itself is sin, and so they stop praying at exactly the moment prayer is most needed. Scripture makes no such assumption. A substantial portion of the Psalter is lament. God did not merely tolerate these prayers; he preserved them and gave them to his people to use. Lament is not the opposite of faith. Unbelief walks away and says nothing. Lament stays and complains to the only one who can help, which is itself an act of trust. Notice the shape of Psalm 13: complaint, petition, and then a turn — but I have trusted in thy mercy. The turn comes at the end, after the honesty, not instead of it.

Pause and respond

What have you stopped saying to God because you thought you should not feel it?

Delay is not the same as absence

DEEPER TEACHING 2

In Luke 18 Jesus tells a parable about a widow and an unjust judge, and Luke tells us the point in advance: men ought always to pray, and not to faint. The parable assumes delay. It does not explain the delay; it addresses what to do inside it. John 11 is more striking still. Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and therefore — the text says therefore — he stayed two days longer where he was. Love and delay were not in conflict. Nothing in Scripture promises that a believer will always be able to see what God is doing while he is doing it. What Scripture does say is that the delay of an answer is not evidence of the absence of God. Isaiah 40 is addressed to people saying exactly what we say: my way is hid from the LORD. The answer is not an explanation but a description of who God is, ending with renewed strength for those who wait.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. On Psalm 13, Henry notes that the psalmist's complaints are mixed with faith, and that the same prayer which begins in trouble ends in praise. Sorrow and trust are found together in one psalm. [H3]

Pause and respond

What are you currently waiting for, and what have you concluded about God because of the wait?

Practice: measure the right span of time

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Growth in a dry season is nearly invisible day to day, which is why the honest question is not how do I feel this week but what is true of me now that was not true five years ago. Take a specific inventory. What sin no longer has the grip it had? What has become normal that used to be difficult — forgiving quickly, telling the truth when it costs something, praying for someone you resent? Write it down, because the mind in a low season does not retrieve this evidence on its own. Then attend to the ordinary means rather than searching for an experience: read Scripture on the days it does nothing for you, keep showing up to the gathered church, and tell one mature believer the truth about where you are. Dry seasons are survived by habit far more often than by insight.

Pause and respond

What is true of you now that was not true five years ago?

Key takeaway. Delay is not desertion, and a prayer that argues with God is still a prayer.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

Psalm 13	<i>Lament moves through complaint and petition to trust.</i>
Psalm 88	<i>A psalm that ends in darkness is still Scripture and still prayer.</i>
Luke 18:1-8	<i>Jesus teaches persistent prayer in the face of delay.</i>
John 11:1-6	<i>Love and delay are not opposites in Christ's dealings.</i>
Isaiah 40:27-31	<i>Those who wait upon the LORD have their strength renewed.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik observes that Psalm 13 refuses both denial and despair. David tells God exactly how it feels, asks for a specific answer, and then rests his case on mercy he has already received. [G3]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is grounded in the words of the psalm itself?

2. Does it fit the way lament functions across the Psalter?

3. What pastoral strength does it offer someone in a long wait?

4. What qualification should be kept beside it?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Two errors flourish in dry seasons: treating dryness as proof of God's rejection, and treating it as a problem that more intense feeling would fix. Both press the believer to perform rather than to wait.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about why I feel nothing?

2. Does the claim require me to know something Scripture has not told me?

3. Would it still be true of a believer who is grieving, exhausted, or ill?

4. Does it lead me to the ordinary means of grace or away from them?

5. Who benefits if I accept it without examination?

A faithful reframe

Delay is not abandonment; lament is a form of faith, and growth too slow to see is still growth.

Case study

Miriam has prayed for her son every day for eleven years. He left the faith at twenty, politely and without a fight, and he is now thirty-one, kind on the phone and entirely uninterested.

For the first years she prayed with expectation. Then with discipline. This past year she has noticed something she has not told anyone: she still prays, but she has stopped asking. The words she uses now are about her own patience and her son's wellbeing. She no longer says the thing she actually wants, because saying it and not receiving it has become harder than not saying it.

A woman in her Bible study, meaning well, told her recently that God's timing is perfect and she should rest in that. Miriam agreed out loud. Privately she has begun to keep a small distance from God — still faithful, still present, but no longer bringing him the one thing that matters most to her.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what Miriam has protected herself from, and what that protection has cost.

Work it through

1. What has Miriam actually stopped doing, and what belief sits underneath it?

2. How does Psalm 13 speak to a prayer that has become too painful to pray?

3. What was right and what was insufficient in what her friend said to her?

4. What is the difference between resting in God's timing and going quiet with God?

5. What would it cost Miriam to say the unsaid request out loud, and who could hear it with her?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I mistaken a delay for a verdict?

2. What would it look like to bring God the complaint instead of the summary?

3. Which ordinary practice should I keep even though it currently does nothing for me?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What promise should I receive even though I cannot presently feel it?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read Psalm 13 aloud slowly, then read it a second time. Ask the group to notice where the psalm turns, and what the turn rests on.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. Why do believers so often go quiet with God in a dry season?

3. What have we said to suffering people that was true but poorly timed?

4. How does the gospel speak to someone who feels nothing?

5. What can this group help you practice this week?

Pray together

Pray Psalm 13 together, in the first person, on behalf of anyone in the group who is waiting. Then pray by name for one person outside the group.

My commitment

Say the unsaid prayer this week — the request you have stopped making. Write down one evidence of growth over the last five years, and keep one ordinary practice regardless of how it feels.

Prayer. Lord, I do not always understand your timing and I will not pretend that I do. Teach me to bring you my complaint instead of my silence. Renew my strength while I wait, and hold me steady in the practices that keep me near you. Amen.

CHAPTER 4 • 1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-13

Temptation and the Long Fight

Temptation is ordinary, survivable, and best resisted early, in the light, and in company.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” — 1 Corinthians 10:13, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you stop treating your temptation as uniquely shameful, recognize the escape God provides earlier than you usually look for it, and replace private willpower with honest company.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 • James 1:13-15

Opening questions

1. What warning comes immediately before the promise in verse 13?

2. What three things does the promise actually say about God?

3. Where does James locate the origin of temptation’s pull?

Common to man

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Paul’s first move is to remove the isolation. No temptation has taken you that is not common to man. Whatever you are fighting, other believers have fought it, are fighting it now, and have been helped. This is not a minimizing statement; it is a liberating one. Shame tells a person that his particular struggle is uniquely disqualifying, and shame’s first instruction is always silence. Silence is what makes temptation strong. Notice the order of Paul’s sentences. Verse 12 warns the confident: let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Verse 13 comforts the frightened. The same paragraph humbles the person who thinks he is beyond this and steadies the person who thinks he is beneath help. James adds a second clarification: God tempts no one, and the pull we feel is drawn out by our own desire. That is uncomfortable, but it is also hopeful, because desire can be brought into the light and addressed, while a mysterious external force cannot.

Pause and respond

What have you not said out loud, and what has the silence cost you?

The escape is usually earlier than we look for it

DEEPER TEACHING 2

God is faithful, Paul writes, and will with the temptation also make a way to escape. Believers often look for that way at the last possible moment — at the door of the sin, when the decision is essentially already made. But the escape in Scripture is nearly always upstream. Joseph in Genesis 39 does not negotiate at the final moment; he refuses early, repeatedly, and when the final moment comes he runs and leaves his garment behind. He looks foolish and he is falsely accused, which is worth noticing: taking the escape sometimes costs something visible. The way out is often unglamorous — leave the room, close the laptop, tell your wife where you are, drive the other route home, end the conversation, go to bed. Endurance in this area is not built by winning a dramatic battle once. It is built by taking a hundred small exits before the battle becomes dramatic.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry pairs the two verses deliberately: the warning against presumption stands beside the promise of a way out, so that no believer grows careless and none despairs. [H4]

Pause and respond

Where is the escape in your usual pattern, and how far upstream is it?

Practice: map the pattern and pre-decide the response

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Most temptation follows a route. It has a time of day, an emotional trigger, a location, a level of tiredness, and a story it tells you. Write yours down as specifically as you can — not the sin, the sequence leading to it. Then make one decision in advance for each link in the chain, while you are clear-headed. Next, break the silence. Tell one mature believer of the same sex, in plain words, and give them permission to ask you a direct question at a set time each week. This is not a substitute for repentance and it is not therapy; it is the ordinary Christian practice of walking in the light. Where a struggle involves addiction, compulsion, abuse, or thoughts of harming yourself, involve a pastor and a qualified professional as well. Wise Christian care includes medical and clinical help; it does not compete with it.

Pause and respond

What are the links in your chain, and which one will you break first?

Key takeaway. Temptation loses most of its power when it is named early, out loud, and to someone who will ask again.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 *Warning and promise stand together; God provides a way to escape.*

James 1:13-15 *Desire conceives and gives birth to sin; God tempts no one.*

Genesis 39:7-12 *Joseph refuses early and finally runs, at cost to his reputation.*

Romans 6:11-14 *Believers reckon themselves dead to sin and yield themselves to God.*

Hebrews 4:15-16 *Christ was tempted and sympathizes; grace is found at the throne.*

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik stresses that the promise of a way of escape is a promise about God's faithfulness rather than about our strength, and that the escape must actually be taken to be of use. [G4]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is clearly grounded in the text?

2. Does it fit Paul's warning in verse 12 as well as his comfort in verse 13?

3. What does this insight protect against?

4. What might it underemphasize?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Two distortions recur here: a victory theology that shames anyone still struggling, and a resignation that treats a besetting sin as simply who I am. The first denies the fight; the second surrenders it.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about how quickly a Christian should change?

2. Does the claim leave room for a long fight and real progress at once?

3. Is Scripture being read in context or used as a slogan?

4. Does the application move me toward confession and help, or toward hiding?

5. Who benefits if I accept it without examination?

A faithful reframe

Temptation is ordinary, survivable, and best resisted early, in the light, and in company.

Case study

Cal manages a small team and works late three nights a week. A colleague on that team, also married, has become the person he talks to most. Nothing has happened. He would say that firmly and he would be telling the truth.

What has happened is smaller and harder to point at. He has started checking whether she is rostered on the same nights. He mentions her at home less than he used to, though he mentions everyone else. Two weeks ago she said something about her marriage that he has thought about since, and he did not tell his wife about the conversation, which he noticed at the time and decided was not worth mentioning.

Cal is watching for a line he has already defined, and he has defined it far downstream. Everything before that line he has classified as nothing. The concealment is not accidental — it began before he could name a reason for it, which is usually the point at which something has started.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice where the concealment begins, not where the conduct would.

Work it through

1. What has Cal actually done, and what has he decided not to count?

2. What does the omission at home reveal that his conduct does not yet?

3. Where is the way of escape in this chain, and how far upstream is it?

4. What would it cost Cal to tell his wife about the conversation now, and what will it cost later?

5. What would a wise, non-dramatic first step look like this week?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I defined the line far enough downstream to keep the ground before it?

2. What am I not telling, and who am I not telling it to?

3. What does walking in the light require of me this week?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What grace should I receive rather than earn?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and ask me again next week?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 aloud, then read verse 12 again on its own. Ask what changes when the warning and the promise are heard together.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. Why does secrecy make temptation stronger?

3. How can a group be safe to confess to without becoming careless about sin?

4. What does our church get right and wrong in how it talks about ongoing struggle?

5. What can this group help you practice this week?

Pray together

Pray for honesty without shame and holiness without pride. Where someone has confessed something tonight, pray for them specifically and keep it in the room.

My commitment

Write out your chain. Break one link this week with a decision made in advance, and tell one trusted believer who will ask you about it again.

Prayer. Lord, you know the pull I feel and you were tempted without sinning. Give me courage to speak before I fall and grace to take the way out while it is still early. Keep me from both despair and pretending. Amen.

CHAPTER 5 • 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

Suffering That Doesn't Lift

Some griefs do not end in this life, and God's grace is given inside them rather than only after them.

“Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” — 2 Corinthians 4:16, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you resist the assumption that unrelieved suffering means unconfessed sin or insufficient faith, understand what Paul received instead of relief, and learn to receive help without shame.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 • 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Opening questions

1. What is wasting away in this passage, and what is being renewed?

2. What does Paul compare the affliction to, and what is the comparison meant to do?

3. What did Paul ask for, and what did he receive?

Not every suffering is a diagnosis

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Job's friends were confident men. Their theology was tidy: suffering follows sin, so a sufferer should search himself and repent. God's verdict on that counsel at the end of the book is severe. In John 9 the disciples ask whether a blind man or his parents sinned, and Jesus refuses the frame entirely. Scripture does teach that God disciplines his children, and that some suffering is the natural consequence of our own choices. But it does not authorize us to read another person's pain as a message, and it does not authorize us to read our own that way either. A believer with a chronic illness, a disability, a bereavement, or a mental-health condition is not thereby under judgment. When we cannot identify a cause, Scripture does not leave us with silence: it leaves us with the character of God, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and the promise that nothing separates us from his love.

Pause and respond

What explanation have you been supplying for your own suffering, and where did it come from?

What Paul received instead of removal

DEEPER TEACHING 2

Paul asked three times for the thorn to be taken away. It was not taken away. He was given a sentence instead: my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. This is one of the most important passages in the Bible for endurance, and it is regularly misused in both directions. It is not a promise that every affliction will be removed if faith is sufficient — Paul's was not. Nor is it a command to enjoy suffering. It is the announcement that Christ's power rests on people who are not managing, and that a life can be fruitful while a body or a mind is failing. That is why 2 Corinthians 4 sets the outward man perishing beside the inward man renewed day by day. Two true things at once. This is not the denial of decline; it is the refusal to let decline have the last word about a person.

Commentary insight — David Guzik. Guzik notes that Paul's prayer was answered, though not granted: the thorn stayed, and sufficient grace was supplied for it. An unanswered request and an answered prayer are not the same thing. [G5]

Pause and respond

What has God supplied inside your hardship that you had not counted as an answer?

Practice: receive help, and keep telling the truth

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Endurance in long suffering is a shared work. Paul's letters are full of people who carried him: Onesiphorus who refreshed him, Epaphroditus who nearly died serving him, the Philippians who sent what he needed. Receiving help is not weakness of faith; refusing it often is. Three practices carry believers through unrelieved suffering. First, keep speaking honestly to God, in the words of the lament psalms if your own words are gone. Second, let specific people in — not everyone, but two or three who will bring meals, sit without fixing, and pray. Third, use every legitimate means of care. Prayer and medicine are not rivals. Where there is illness, injury, mental-health crisis, abuse, or danger, seek qualified professional and medical help; pastoral care and prayer accompany that help rather than replacing it.

Pause and respond

Who are the two or three people you will let in, and what will you ask them for?

Key takeaway. Grace is often given inside the trouble rather than instead of it, and that is still grace.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 *Treasure in earthen vessels; the inward man renewed daily.*

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 *Sufficient grace given in place of removal.*

John 9:1-3 *Jesus refuses to read suffering as a verdict on the sufferer.*

Romans 8:35-39 *Nothing in creation separates believers from the love of Christ.*

Psalms 34:18 *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Henry observes that the afflictions Paul calls light are weighed against an eternal weight of glory, and that the comparison is what makes them bearable rather than any smallness in the trouble itself. [H5]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is grounded in the words of the passage?

2. Does it fit Paul's own account of his hardships elsewhere in 2 Corinthians?

3. What pastoral strength does it offer someone with no prospect of relief?

4. What qualification should be kept beside it?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Telling a suffering person that more faith would end their suffering adds guilt to grief and can delay urgent medical or professional help. It is not comfort, and it is not sound teaching.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about why this suffering continues?

2. Does the claim require knowledge Scripture has not given us?

3. Would I say it to Paul about his thorn, or to Job?

4. Does it lead the sufferer toward help or away from it?

5. Who benefits if the sufferer accepts it without examination?

A faithful reframe

Some griefs do not end in this life, and God's grace is given inside them rather than only after them.

Case study

Deborah was diagnosed with a degenerative condition four years ago. She still comes to church most weeks, usually late, and leaves before the last song because standing in a crowded foyer is difficult.

A man she barely knows told her after a service that God had shown him she would be healed, and that she should stop taking her medication as an act of faith. She did not, and she has not told anyone about the conversation. What she cannot shake is the second half of it — the implication that the illness is still here because of something in her.

She has stopped asking for prayer. When someone asks how she is, she says fine, because the honest answer invites either advice or pity and she has run out of energy for both. The people who could help her most are the ones she has quietly stopped telling the truth to.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what was done to Deborah and what she has since done to herself.

Work it through

1. What was wrong with what the man said, and what harm did the second half do?

2. How do 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and John 9:1-3 speak into her situation?

3. Why has Deborah stopped asking for prayer, and what did that decision protect?

4. What would a church that actually helped her do differently on a Sunday morning?

5. What is one specific thing someone in her congregation could offer this week?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I read my own suffering as a verdict on my faith?

2. What help have I refused, and what was the refusal protecting?

3. What would honest speech to God sound like from me this week?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What promise should I receive even while the trouble remains?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 12:7-10 aloud. Ask the group to notice what Paul asked for, what he received, and what he concluded.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. What unhelpful things have been said to suffering people in our circles, and why do we say them?

3. How do we pray for healing honestly without implying that a sufferer lacks faith?

4. What practical help does long-term illness or grief actually need from a church?

5. What can this group commit to doing for someone this month?

Pray together

Pray for healing plainly and for grace to endure just as plainly. Pray for anyone in the group carrying something that will not lift, and ask what practical help can be arranged this week.

My commitment

Name one person you will let in, and one specific thing you will ask them for. If you have been avoiding medical or professional help, take the first step toward it this week.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, you know what it is to suffer and not be spared. When the trouble does not lift, give me grace that is sufficient, friends who will stay, and honesty in my prayers. Renew the inward man day by day. Amen.

CHAPTER 6 • PROVERBS 24:16

Falling, and Getting Back Up

What keeps a believer in the race is not an unbroken record but a practiced return.

“A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” — Proverbs 24:16, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you tell the difference between falling and leaving, understand how Christ restores a failed disciple, and take the concrete steps that turn shame into repentance.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: Proverbs 24:16 • John 21:15-19

Opening questions

1. What distinguishes the just man in this proverb from the wicked?

2. How many times does Jesus ask Peter the question, and why might that number matter?

3. What does Jesus give Peter at the end of the conversation?

Falling is not the same as leaving

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Proverbs 24:16 is a strange comfort. It does not say a just man never falls. It says he falls and rises, and that this rising is what marks him. The Bible is unembarrassed about the failures of its people: Abraham lies, Moses strikes the rock, David commits adultery and arranges a death, Peter denies Christ with cursing, Mark abandons a mission. What separates these from apostasy is not the size of the failure but the direction taken afterward. Judas and Peter both failed in the same week. One went out and hanged himself; the other wept, and was found by the risen Christ on a beach. Believers in a long walk need this clarity, because the enemy's most effective work after a fall is not the sin itself but the conclusion drawn from it: that you are now a different category of person, and there is no road back. That conclusion has ended more Christian lives than the original sin ever did.

Pause and respond

What conclusion did you draw about yourself after your last significant failure?

How Christ restores

DEEPER TEACHING 2

John records that Peter denied Jesus beside a fire of coals, and that when Jesus restored him it was beside a fire of coals. The setting is deliberate. Christ takes Peter back to the place of the failure rather than around it. Three times Peter had denied; three times Jesus asks whether Peter loves him. Peter is grieved by the third question, and the grief is not cruelty — it is the completion of something. Then comes the part that is easy to miss: Jesus gives him work. Feed my sheep. Restoration is not merely being forgiven; it is being trusted again with something to do. Notice also what Jesus does not do. He does not minimize the denial, does not require Peter to explain himself, and does not put him on probation. He asks about love, and he assigns responsibility. Any restoration that leaves a repentant believer permanently benched has not followed Christ's pattern.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry notes that Christ's threefold question answers Peter's threefold denial, and that the commission which follows shows how fully a penitent is received back into service. [H6]

Pause and respond

Where do you need to be restored to work rather than only to forgiveness?

Practice: repentance has parts, and shame is not one of them

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Shame and repentance feel similar and do opposite things. Shame says I am the problem, keeps the matter private, rehearses the failure, and produces paralysis. Repentance names the specific act, brings it into the light, makes what restitution is possible, changes the conditions that made it easy, and returns to ordinary obedience. Work through it concretely. Name the sin as an instance rather than a category. Confess it to God and, where the sin involved another person, to that person if doing so will not cause further harm — seek pastoral counsel where the situation is complicated. Repair what can be repaired. Change one practical condition. Then go back to the ordinary things: the next prayer, the next Sunday, the next duty. The return is usually undramatic, and its undramatic quality is exactly why it works.

Pause and respond

What is the specific instance, and what is the first ordinary thing you will return to?

Key takeaway. The mark of a believer is not that he never falls, but that he keeps getting up and going back.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

Proverbs 24:16	<i>The righteous fall and rise again; the difference is the rising.</i>
John 21:15-19	<i>Christ restores Peter at the site of the failure and gives him work.</i>
Psalms 51:1-12	<i>David asks for cleansing, a clean heart, and restored joy.</i>
1 John 1:5-9	<i>Walking in the light includes confession and cleansing.</i>
Micah 7:8-9	<i>A fallen believer answers the enemy with confidence in God's vindication.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik draws attention to the charcoal fire in John 21, reading it as a deliberate return to the scene of Peter's denial so that the restoration is as specific as the failure. [G6]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is clearly grounded in the text of John 21?

2. Does it fit the way the Gospels present Peter elsewhere?

3. What does this insight protect against?

4. What might it underemphasize about the seriousness of sin?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Shame dressed as humility keeps a fallen believer out of the light and out of the church. Cheap grace, its opposite error, treats repentance as a sentence spoken rather than a life changed.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about what God does with a repentant believer?

2. Does the claim take sin seriously and forgiveness seriously at once?

3. Is Scripture being read in context or used to excuse or to condemn?

4. Does the application produce confession, repair, and return — or hiding?

5. Who benefits if I accept it without examination?

A faithful reframe

What keeps a believer in the race is not an unbroken record but a practiced return.

Case study

Two years ago Warren was removed from a volunteer role after a financial matter came to light. He repaid what was owed within a month, apologized to the two people involved, and stopped attending.

He watches the service online most Sundays. When his old small-group leader texts, he replies warmly and does not commit to anything. He tells himself he is giving people time, though nobody has asked him for time and two men have asked him to breakfast.

What Warren is protecting is not the church's comfort. It is the moment of walking through the door and being seen by people who know. He has repented of the sin and has not yet been able to face the room, and after two years the room has become the larger obstacle.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice which problem Warren has solved and which one he has not.

Work it through

1. What has Warren done rightly, and what remains undone?

2. What is the difference between the guilt he has dealt with and the shame he has not?

3. How does Christ's restoration of Peter speak to the fear of being seen?

4. What would a wise church do to make the first Sunday back easier?

5. What is one concrete step Warren could take this month, and who should make the first move?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I confused shame with repentance?

2. What have I repented of and still not returned from?

3. Who is waiting for me to come back, and what am I afraid of?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What forgiveness should I receive rather than re-earn?

3. What specific act of return can I make this week?

4. Who can walk in with me?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read John 21:15-19 aloud. Ask the group to notice the setting, the number of questions, and what Jesus gives Peter at the end.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. What makes it hard for a person to come back to a church after a public failure?

3. How can we take sin seriously and still make return possible?

4. Where does our care for the fallen stop too early?

5. Is there someone we should contact this week?

Pray together

Pray for anyone who has stopped coming back, by name if it is appropriate. Ask God for churches that are safe to return to and honest about sin at the same time.

My commitment

Name one instance rather than a category, confess it, repair what can be repaired, change one condition, and return to one ordinary practice this week.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, you restored Peter at the same kind of fire where he failed you. Give me the courage to be seen, the honesty to name what I have done, and the grace to get up and go back to the work you have given me. Amen.

CHAPTER 7 • JOHN 21:20-22

The Comparison Trap

Comparison drains endurance by replacing the question ‘am I following?’ with the question ‘how do I rank?’

“What is that to thee? follow thou me.” — John 21:22, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you notice when comparison has taken over your thinking, understand what Scripture does with envy among God’s people, and return to the only measurement that belongs to you.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: John 21:20-22 • Galatians 6:4-5

Opening questions

1. What has just happened to Peter before he asks this question?

2. What does Jesus refuse to tell him, and what does he repeat instead?

3. What does Galatians 6:4 tell a believer to examine?

What is that to thee?

DEEPER TEACHING 1

The timing of Peter’s question is remarkable. He has just been restored, given work, and told plainly that his own road will end in a death that glorifies God. Then he turns, sees John, and asks: what shall this man do? Within a sentence of receiving his own commission, he wants to know how it compares. Christ’s answer is short to the point of bluntness: what is that to thee? follow thou me. He does not explain John’s future. He repeats the original call and adds an emphatic pronoun — you follow me. This is not a rebuke for caring about a brother. It is the removal of a question that a disciple has no business answering. Comparison feels like information gathering. It is actually a change of subject, and the subject it changes away from is obedience. Peter’s question is the one nearly every believer asks eventually, usually right after being given something difficult to do.

Pause and respond

Whose road have you been asking about instead of walking your own?

Asaph in the sanctuary

DEEPER TEACHING 2

Psalm 73 is the honest account of a believer whose faith nearly failed over comparison. Asaph looked at the prosperity of people who did not fear God, saw their ease, and concluded that he had kept his heart clean for nothing. He does not tidy this up; he says his feet had almost slipped. What breaks the spell is not new information about the wicked and not a better attitude. It is a place: until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. In the presence of God the comparison is re-framed by a longer view. The psalm then turns to one of the most striking confessions in Scripture — whom have I in heaven but thee? — which is only reachable through the envy, not around it. Asaph does not end up with more than the prosperous had. He ends up with God, and finds that this was the point all along.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. On Psalm 73 Henry observes that envy of the prospering wicked is a common trial even for strong believers, and that the tempted soul finds its answer by resorting to the sanctuary. [H7]

Pause and respond

What does your comparison look like when it is stated plainly, as Asaph stated his?

Practice: prove your own work

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Galatians 6:4 gives the alternative to comparison and it is not modesty — it is examination. Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. The instruction is to look at your own obedience directly rather than through the lens of someone else's. That is harder than comparison and far more useful. Take it practically. Ask what God has actually given you to do this year, in your household, your work, your church, and your neighborhood, and evaluate that. Then deal with the input. If a particular feed, group, or habit reliably produces envy, change the input rather than resolving to feel differently about it — unfollow, mute, or leave. And take the direct step Christian love requires: thank one of the people you have been comparing yourself with, specifically and to their face. Gratitude and envy cannot occupy the same sentence.

Pause and respond

What has God given you to do this year, and how are you actually doing at it?

Key takeaway. You are not asked to outrun anyone. You are asked to follow Christ.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

John 21:20-22	<i>Christ refuses the comparison and repeats the call to follow.</i>
Psalms 73:1-3, 16-26	<i>Envy nearly overturns faith and is answered in God's presence.</i>
Galatians 6:4-5	<i>Each believer proves his own work and bears his own load.</i>
2 Corinthians 10:12	<i>Measuring themselves by themselves, they are without understanding.</i>
Romans 12:15	<i>Rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik reads Christ's reply to Peter as a redirection rather than a reprimand: the disciple's business is his own following, and the emphatic you in the command carries the weight. [G7]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is grounded in the words of John 21?

2. Does it fit what Jesus has just said to Peter about his own future?

-
-
3. What pastoral strength does it offer someone who feels overlooked?
-
-

-
-
4. What qualification should be kept beside it?
-
-

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Comparison hides easily behind spiritual language: concern for another's doctrine, interest in a ministry's numbers, or a prayer request that is really a report. Ambition and envy both learn to speak Christian.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about whose life is going better?
-
-
2. Am I comparing my inside to someone else's outside?
-
-
3. Would this thought survive being said out loud to the person concerned?
-
-
4. Does it move me toward gratitude and my own obedience, or away from both?
-
-
5. What would I have to ignore in order to keep believing it?
-
-

A faithful reframe

Comparison drains endurance by replacing the question 'am I following?' with the question 'how do I rank?'

Case study

Joanna has taught the same women's Bible study for six years. Twelve women come. She prepares carefully, visits them when they are ill, and knows their families.

A woman she trained with runs a study in another town that now fills a hall, posts clips from it, and was recently invited to speak at a conference Joanna has attended twice as an attendee. Joanna shares the posts. She means it when she says she is glad.

What has changed is quieter. Joanna has begun to describe her own study apologetically — just a small group, only about twelve of us. Last month she cut short a visit to a member in hospital because she was behind on preparation, and she has caught herself preparing for an audience that is not in the room. The twelve women have not changed. The reason Joanna is teaching them has.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what has changed in Joanna and what has not changed in her circumstances.

Work it through

1. What has Joanna actually lost, given that nothing about her study has changed?

2. What does the apologetic description reveal about the standard she has adopted?

3. How does Galatians 6:4 speak to the way she is now preparing?

4. What did the shortened hospital visit cost, and what was it spent on?

5. What would proving her own work look like for Joanna this month?

Personal reflection

1. Where has comparison changed why I do what I do?

2. Whose approval have I been preparing for?

3. What has God given me that I have described apologetically?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What grace should I receive rather than compete for?

3. What specific act of obedience can I complete this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read John 21:20-22 aloud, then Psalm 73:1-3 and 25-26. Ask the group to notice what Jesus refuses to answer and where Asaph's envy is finally undone.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. Where does comparison get spiritual language in Christian life?

3. How has visible ministry online changed the way we measure faithfulness?

4. Who in this church does faithful work that nobody sees?

5. What can this group help you practice this week?

Pray together

Thank God specifically for the work he has given each person in the room. Pray for someone whose gifts you have envied, by name, and ask for gladness in their good.

My commitment

Name the input that reliably produces envy and change it this week. Then thank one person you have been comparing yourself with, specifically and directly.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, you told Peter to stop asking about another man's road and to follow you. Free me from measuring my life against lives you never gave me. Make me glad in the good of others and faithful in the work you have actually put in front of me. Amen.

CHAPTER 8 • ACTS 2:42; GALATIANS 6:2

Habits That Hold You

Endurance is carried by ordinary habits and ordinary people, not by intensity.

“They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” — Acts 2:42, KJV

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you build practices small enough to survive a bad week, understand why the gathered church is a means of endurance rather than an optional extra, and let other believers carry what you cannot carry alone.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: Acts 2:42-47 • Hebrews 10:23-25

Opening questions

1. What four things did the first believers continue in?

2. What does the word ‘stedfastly’ add to the list?

3. In Hebrews 10, what is the stated purpose of not forsaking the assembly?

The ordinary means

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Luke’s summary of the first church is unspectacular and easy to read past. They continued steadfastly in teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. Everything dramatic in Acts happens around this list, not instead of it. Christians have long called these the ordinary means of grace, and the adjective is the important part. God has bound himself to work through means that are repeatable, unimpressive, and available on a bad week: Scripture read and preached, prayer, the Lord’s table, and the company of believers. Endurance over decades is largely a matter of staying attached to these. Feelings vary; the means do not. The believer who reads Scripture only when it moves him will read it less and less, because the moving is downstream of the reading rather than a precondition for it. The habit carries the season; the season does not have to justify the habit.

Pause and respond

Which of the four have quietly dropped out of your week?

Hands that hold up other hands

DEEPER TEACHING 2

In Exodus 17 Israel prevails while Moses holds up his hands, and Moses' hands grow heavy. The solution is not a rebuke and not more determination. Aaron and Hur put a stone under him and hold his hands up, one on each side, until sunset. It is one of the plainest pictures of Christian endurance in Scripture: a man doing what God gave him to do, unable to keep doing it alone, held up by two people until the day is over. Galatians 6:2 makes the practice a command — bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ — and Ecclesiastes 4 puts it plainly: two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Much of what believers call a crisis of faith is closer to exhaustion in isolation. The remedy is not always a new insight. Sometimes it is two people, one on each side, until sunset.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry treats the steadfast continuance of Acts 2:42 as the pattern of a healthy church: teaching, fellowship, the ordinance, and prayer held together rather than chosen between. [H8]

Pause and respond

Who has held your hands up, and whose hands are you currently holding?

Practice: build a rule small enough to survive a bad week

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Most devotional plans are designed for a good week and collapse in a hard one, which is precisely when they are needed. Build for the bad week instead. Choose a minimum you can keep on your worst realistic day — five minutes in a Gospel, one written prayer, a psalm read aloud — and treat that as the floor rather than the goal. Attach each practice to something that already happens: the kettle boiling, the commute, the moment before the first email. Decide in advance what you will do after you miss, because the missing is inevitable and the plan that has no re-entry point is the one that ends. Then add the parts you cannot do alone: a Sunday you do not negotiate with, one meal a month with believers, and one person who knows how you actually are. Write the whole thing on one page.

Pause and respond

What is your floor, and what will you do the day after you miss it?

Key takeaway. Small practices kept for years outlast large intentions kept for weeks.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

Acts 2:42-47	<i>The first church continued steadfastly in four ordinary practices.</i>
Hebrews 10:23-25	<i>Assembling together exists for encouragement and provocation to love.</i>
Exodus 17:8-13	<i>Aaron and Hur hold up the hands of a man who cannot hold them up alone.</i>
Galatians 6:1-2	<i>Restoring the fallen and bearing burdens fulfils the law of Christ.</i>
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12	<i>Two are better than one; a threefold cord is not quickly broken.</i>

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik notes that the four practices of Acts 2:42 are given together, and that a church which keeps some and neglects others has changed the pattern rather than adapted it. [G8]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is grounded in the text of Acts 2?

2. Does it fit how Luke describes the church in the rest of Acts?

3. What does this insight protect against?

4. What might it underemphasize?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Spiritual disciplines can quietly become a way of earning standing rather than receiving grace. The opposite drift is just as common: treating the gathered church as optional and then wondering why endurance is so hard alone.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about what my practices achieve?

2. Is my standing with God resting on Christ or on my consistency?

3. Would this plan survive a week of illness, night shifts, or a new baby?

4. Does it connect me to other believers or make faith more private?

5. What would I have to ignore in order to keep believing it?

A faithful reframe

Endurance is carried by ordinary habits and ordinary people, not by intensity.

Case study

Theo has four children under nine and drives ninety minutes a day. Twice a year, usually after a conference or a hard patch, he starts a plan: an hour each morning, a reading schedule, a prayer journal.

It lasts about eleven days. Then a child is sick, or a deadline moves, and he misses two mornings. After the second miss he stops entirely — not with a decision, just by not starting again. The journal goes in the drawer with the other two.

Theo has concluded that he is undisciplined. What is actually true is that he has never built anything he could keep on a bad day, and he has no plan at all for the day after a miss. He also has no one who knows about any of this, so each collapse is private and each restart begins from zero.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what Theo has concluded about himself, and whether the evidence supports it.

Work it through

1. What is Theo actually failing at — devotion, or design?

2. What would a floor look like for a man with his commute and his household?

3. Why does the second miss end the whole plan, and what is missing at that point?

4. What does Acts 2:42 suggest about the parts of this he cannot do alone?

5. Who could ask him about it, and how often should they ask?

Personal reflection

1. Where have I built for a good week and then blamed my character?

2. Which practice would I keep on my worst realistic day?

3. Who knows how I actually am?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse?

2. What grace should I receive rather than earn by consistency?

3. What specific practice will I begin this week at a size I can keep?

4. Who can ask me about it next week?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read Acts 2:42 and Hebrews 10:23-25 aloud. Ask the group which of the four practices is hardest for them at this stage of life, and why.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. How have our devotional expectations been shaped by people with different circumstances?

3. What does bearing burdens look like practically in this group?

4. Who is carrying something alone right now?

5. What can we arrange this week rather than only pray about?

Pray together

Pray for the specific burdens named tonight, and decide who will do what before the group ends. Pray for endurance in unremarkable weeks.

My commitment

Write a one-page rule: a floor you can keep on a bad day, a re-entry plan for the day after a miss, a Sunday you do not negotiate, and one person who will ask you about it.

Prayer. Lord, you gave your church ordinary means and ordinary people, and you work through both. Keep me steady in small things. Give me the humility to be held up and the readiness to hold up someone else. Amen.

CHAPTER 9 • 2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8; PSALM 71

Aging, and Finishing Well

The last stretch of the race has work of its own — witness, blessing, and trust — and the finish is Christ’s to give.

*“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” — 2 Timothy 4:7,
KJV*

Chapter aim. This chapter will help you see the particular work of later years, face declining strength without concluding that usefulness has ended, and rest your finish on the righteous Judge rather than on your own record.

READ BEFORE CONTINUING: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 • Psalm 71:9, 17-18

Opening questions

1. What three things does Paul say about his own course, and in what tense?

2. Who gives the crown, and to whom is it promised?

3. What does the psalmist ask for in old age, and what does he want to do with it?

Forsake me not when my strength faileth

DEEPER TEACHING 1

Psalm 71 is the prayer of an old believer, and it is honest about the fear that comes with age: cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. This is not a failure of faith. It is faith bringing the actual fear to God rather than pretending it away. What the psalmist then asks for is striking. He does not ask for restored strength or for comfort. He asks for time to tell: now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. The particular work of the last stretch is testimony — handing on to people who did not see what you saw. Failing strength does not remove that work. In some respects it qualifies a person for it, because the witness of someone who has kept the faith through decline carries a weight that no capable younger voice can supply.

Pause and respond

What has God done in your life that the next generation has not heard from you?

Fruit in old age

DEEPER TEACHING 2

Psalm 92 makes a claim that runs against everything our culture assumes about later life: those planted in the house of the LORD shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing. Caleb at eighty-five asks for the hill country rather than a comfortable retirement. Anna, a widow of great age, is in the temple day and night, and she is the one who recognizes the child. Simeon holds the infant Christ and is ready to depart in peace. None of these is a picture of achievement; each is a picture of presence, faithfulness, and readiness. The fruit named in Scripture for later years is not usually productivity. It is prayer, blessing, telling the truth about God, and being unafraid to die. Younger believers often cannot see how valuable this is. Older believers often cannot see it either, which is the more urgent problem.

Commentary insight — Matthew Henry. Henry takes Psalm 92:14 as a promise that grace does not wither with the body, and that those planted in God's house continue to be useful when natural strength is spent. [H9]

Pause and respond

What fruit is actually available to you in this season, as opposed to a previous one?

Practice: the finish is given, not earned

DEEPER TEACHING 3

Paul writes that a crown of righteousness is laid up for him, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give him at that day — and then adds, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. The finish is not a reward for exceptional service; it is given to all who have loved his appearing. That is where assurance belongs at the end of a long walk: not on a record you audit, but on a Judge who is righteous and a Savior who keeps his own. Take three practical steps for the last stretch, whatever your age. Say the things you have not said — to a child, a grandchild, a younger believer — specifically and soon. Give one blessing you have been holding back. And settle the question of assurance now, in Scripture, rather than leaving it to be settled in a hospital room when you are tired.

Pause and respond

What is the thing you have not said, and to whom will you say it?

Key takeaway. Finishing faithfully is not a performance to be judged but a gift to be received from the righteous Judge.

Scripture map

Read each passage in context. Note how it strengthens, qualifies, or applies the chapter's main teaching.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 *The course finished, the faith kept, the crown given by the Judge.*

Psalms 71:9, 17-18 *An aging believer asks for time to tell the next generation.*

Psalms 92:12-15 *The planted still bring forth fruit in old age.*

Joshua 14:10-12 *Caleb at eighty-five asks for the mountain rather than for rest.*

Luke 2:25-38 *Simeon and Anna recognize Christ at the end of long, faithful waiting.*

Trace the connections

Christian commentary lens

A historic voice. Guzik points out that Paul's crown is promised to all who love Christ's appearing, so the passage describes the ordinary Christian hope rather than an apostle's special reward. [G9]

Christian commentators can clarify language, historical setting, theological connections, and pastoral application. They are valuable teachers, but they are not inspired Scripture. Compare their claims with the biblical text, notice where their traditions differ, and resist treating one interpreter as the final authority.

Questions for evaluation

1. Which part of this reading is grounded in the words of 2 Timothy 4?

2. Does it fit Paul's teaching on grace elsewhere?

3. What pastoral strength does it offer someone near the end?

4. What qualification should be kept beside it?

Discernment workshop

The distortion to recognize. Two failures shadow the last stretch: bitterness that rehearses old injuries until they crowd out gratitude, and a nostalgia that treats a past season as the only real one. Both stop the work that is still available.

Test the message

1. What is being claimed about the usefulness of older believers?

2. Does the claim rest on Scripture or on our culture's view of productivity?

3. Would it still be true of someone frail, housebound, or caring for a spouse?

4. Does it lead to gratitude and testimony or to comparison with the past?

5. Who benefits if I accept it without examination?

A faithful reframe

The last stretch of the race has work of its own — witness, blessing, and trust — and the finish is Christ’s to give.

Case study

Gordon is seventy-four. He led the church’s men’s ministry for twenty-two years and handed it on four years ago to a man in his thirties who has changed nearly everything about it.

He still attends. He is polite about the changes and privately catalogues them. His wife’s memory has begun to fail, so most of his week is now spent doing things nobody sees: appointments, medications, patience at four in the morning.

When a young father asked him recently how he had kept going through the years when his own children were small, Gordon gave a short answer and changed the subject. He has come to think of himself as a man whose useful years are behind him, and he is currently doing the hardest and most Christlike work of his life without recognizing it as work at all.

Read the situation twice before working the questions. Notice what Gordon counts as service and what he does not.

Work it through

1. What is Gordon actually doing with his weeks, and why does he not count it?

2. What did the young father ask for, and what did Gordon withhold?

3. How do Psalm 71:18 and Psalm 92:14 speak to a man in his position?

4. What is the difference between grieving a handover and cataloguing it?

5. What is one thing his church could ask of him that he could actually give?

Personal reflection

1. What work of this season have I failed to count as work?

2. What have I not said to someone younger, and why?

3. Where does my assurance actually rest today?

Examine the heart

1. What sin should I confess without excuse — bitterness, nostalgia, or self-pity?

2. What promise about the finish should I receive with gratitude?

3. What specific blessing or word can I give this week?

4. Who can pray with me and help me follow through?

S.O.A.P. study

Scripture

Copy a short portion accurately. Read the surrounding paragraph.

Observation

What does the passage say? Note commands, reasons, promises, and repeated ideas.

Application

Choose one response that grows directly from the passage's meaning.

Prayer

Respond with worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and a request for help.

Group study and prayer

Opening. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and Psalm 71:17-18 aloud. Ask the older members of the group to speak first tonight.

Discuss

1. What in this chapter challenged or encouraged you?

2. How does our church treat its oldest members, in practice rather than in principle?

3. What have we learned from someone who finished well?

4. What unseen work is being done in this church right now by people who do not count it?

5. What can this group arrange this week for someone carrying a long load?

Pray together

Pray for those in the group who are caring for a spouse or parent, and for those who feel shelved. Give thanks by name for believers who finished well.

My commitment

Say the thing you have not said to someone younger this week. Then write down where your assurance rests, in Scripture, and keep it somewhere you will find it later.

Prayer. Lord, you are the righteous Judge and the keeper of your people. Give me grace for the work of this season, whatever it is, and words for those coming after me. When my strength fails, do not forsake me. Bring me home. Amen.

APPENDIX A

Thirty-Day Field Guide

One passage, one practice, and one prayer for each of thirty days. Tick the box when the day is done. Three days pair naturally with each chapter.

DAY 1 Run with patience — Hebrews 12:1-3 ■

Observe. What is laid aside, what is run, and where is the runner told to look?

Practice. Name the pace you have been using to judge yourself. Write down whose pace it actually is.

Pray. Ask for endurance rather than for speed, and thank God that Christ finishes what he begins.

DAY 2 He will finish it — Philippians 1:6 ■

Observe. Who began the work, and who is responsible for completing it?

Practice. Write one sentence of evidence that God has been at work in you over the last five years.

Pray. Thank God that your standing rests on his faithfulness rather than on your consistency.

DAY 3 Held by two hands — John 10:27-29 ■

Observe. Whose hands hold the sheep, and what is said about being plucked out?

Practice. Write down the fear you have about not lasting. Put this verse beside it in writing.

Pray. Ask God for assurance grounded in Christ's keeping rather than in your performance.

DAY 4 Two gates — Matthew 7:13-14 ■

Observe. How does Jesus distinguish the two roads, and by what does he identify each?

Practice. Name the point this week where your road quietly narrows or widens.

Pray. Ask for a clear head about the road and gladness about where it leads.

DAY 5 Counting the cost — Luke 14:28-33 ■

Observe. What do the two illustrations have in common, and what is Jesus warning against?

Practice. Write down one cost of following Christ that you were not told about in advance.

Pray. Ask God for honesty about the cost and no illusions about the road.

DAY 6 Planted — Psalm 1 ■

Observe. What does the blessed man walk in, stand in, and sit in — and what is he planted by?

Practice. Identify where you are currently planted, and one thing that keeps you near the water.

Pray. Pray to be settled rather than merely busy.

DAY 7 How long — Psalm 13 ■

Observe. Count the questions in the first two verses, then find where the psalm turns.

Practice. Say to God the thing you stopped saying because you thought you should not feel it.

Pray. Pray the psalm as your own, complaint and all, ending where it ends.

DAY 8 A psalm that ends in the dark — Psalm 88 ■

Observe. How does this psalm end, and what does its presence in Scripture tell you?

Practice. Write one honest sentence about your present state, without correcting it.

Pray. Bring the honest sentence to God and leave it with him.

DAY 9 Pray and do not faint — Luke 18:1-8 ■

Observe. What does Luke say the parable is for, before Jesus tells it?

Practice. Return to a request you have abandoned. Make it again today, out loud.

Pray. Ask for persistence in prayer and freedom from the fear of praying in vain.

DAY 10 Strength renewed — Isaiah 40:27-31 ■

Observe. What are the people saying in verse 27, and how does God answer them?

Practice. Write down what you have concluded about God from a delay, and test it against this passage.

Pray. Wait on the Lord in the plainest sense: sit still and ask for renewed strength.

DAY 11 Common to man — 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 ■

Observe. What warning precedes the promise, and what three things does the promise say about God?

Practice. Name your temptation plainly in writing, as a sequence rather than a category.

Pray. Ask for humility if you feel strong and for hope if you feel defeated.

DAY 12 Where it begins — James 1:13-15 ■

Observe. Trace the sequence James describes from desire to death.

Practice. Identify the earliest link in your own chain, and one decision made in advance.

Pray. Ask God for honesty about your own desires rather than only about your circumstances.

DAY 13 He ran — Genesis 39:7-12 ■

Observe. How often is Joseph approached, and what does he finally do?

Practice. Take one small exit today, well before the moment of decision.

Pray. Ask for courage to leave a room, close a screen, or end a conversation early.

DAY 14 Renewed day by day — 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ■

Observe. What two things are happening at once in verse 16?

Practice. Write both truths about your own life in a single sentence, joined by ‘and’.

Pray. Thank God for renewal that is inward and daily rather than visible and sudden.

DAY 15 Sufficient grace — 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ■

Observe. What did Paul ask for, how often, and what was he given?

Practice. Name what God has supplied inside your hardship that you had not counted as an answer.

Pray. Ask for grace inside the trouble, and ask plainly for relief as well.

DAY 16 Neither this man nor his parents — John 9:1-3 ■

Observe. What frame do the disciples bring, and what does Jesus do with it?

Practice. Notice one explanation you have supplied for your own or another’s suffering. Set it down.

Pray. Repent of any verdict you have passed on a sufferer, including yourself.

DAY 17 Nothing separates — Romans 8:35-39 ■

Observe. List everything Paul names, and what he concludes about all of it.

Practice. Write the item from your own life that belongs on Paul’s list.

Pray. Pray this passage aloud where you usually feel cut off.

DAY 18 Seven times — Proverbs 24:16 ■

Observe. What does this proverb assume will happen, and what marks the just man?

Practice. Name a failure you concluded something permanent from. Write what the proverb says instead.

Pray. Ask for the grace to get up rather than the record of never falling.

DAY 19 Beside the fire — John 21:15-19 ■

Observe. Notice the setting, the number of questions, and what Jesus gives Peter at the end.

Practice. Take one concrete step of return: a text, a door, a conversation you have avoided.

Pray. Ask Christ for restoration that includes work, not only forgiveness.

DAY 20 Create in me — Psalm 51:1-12 ■

Observe. What does David ask for beyond forgiveness?

Practice. Confess one instance in writing, not a category. Then destroy the paper if you need to.

Pray. Ask for a clean heart, a right spirit, and restored joy.

DAY 21 Follow thou me — John 21:20-22 ■

Observe. What does Peter ask, and what does Jesus refuse to tell him?

Practice. Write the name of the person you have been comparing yourself to, then write Christ's answer under it.

Pray. Ask for freedom from a question that is not yours to answer.

DAY 22 Until I went in — Psalm 73:16-26 ■

Observe. Where does Asaph's perspective change, and what does he conclude in verse 25?

Practice. Go where God is worshipped this week, and go with the envy rather than hiding it.

Pray. Pray verse 25 as your own, slowly.

DAY 23 Prove your own work — Galatians 6:4-5 ■

Observe. What is each person told to examine, and what is the promised result?

Practice. Change one input that reliably produces envy. Then thank one person you have envied.

Pray. Ask for gladness in another's good and diligence in your own work.

DAY 24 They continued — Acts 2:42-47 ■

Observe. What four practices are listed, and what does 'steadfastly' add?

Practice. Choose your floor: the smallest version of one practice you can keep on a bad day.

Pray. Ask God to work through ordinary means when you feel nothing.

DAY 25 Not forsaking — Hebrews 10:23-25 ■

Observe. What three exhortations are given, and what reason is attached?

Practice. Decide the Sunday you will not negotiate, and write it down.

Pray. Pray for your congregation by name, including someone you find difficult.

DAY 26 Hands held up — Exodus 17:8-13 ■

Observe. Who does what in this account, and how long do they do it?

Practice. Ask one person to hold your hands up this month, and name what that means practically.

Pray. Ask for humility to be helped and readiness to help someone else.

DAY 27 Two are better — Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ■

Observe. What four advantages are given for two over one?

Practice. Do the practical thing you have been praying about for someone else — today.

Pray. Thank God for the people who have kept you going, then tell one of them.

DAY 28 Until I have shewed — Psalm 71:9, 17-18 ■

Observe. What does the psalmist fear, and what does he ask for time to do?

Practice. Tell one younger person something specific God has done in your life.

Pray. Ask God not to forsake you when strength fails, and for words to hand on.

DAY 29 Fruit in old age — Psalm 92:12-15 ■

Observe. What is promised to those planted in the house of the LORD?

Practice. Name the fruit available in this season, as distinct from a previous one.

Pray. Pray for the oldest believers you know, by name.

DAY 30 A crown laid up — 2 Timothy 4:6-8 ■

Observe. Who gives the crown, and to whom is it promised besides Paul?

Practice. Write down where your assurance rests, in Scripture, and keep it where you will find it later.

Pray. Thank God for a finish that is given rather than earned, and ask to love his appearing.

APPENDIX B

Leader Guide, Session Briefs & Covenant

A flexible nine-session rhythm

- Welcome and prayer — 10 minutes
- Read the main passage — 10 minutes
- Discuss the teaching and Scripture map — 25 minutes
- Work through the case study — 15 minutes
- Name one application — 10 minutes
- Pray in response — 15 minutes

Leader posture

Lead as a fellow disciple under Scripture. Encourage participation without pressuring disclosure. Correct confidently when the gospel is distorted, but distinguish central Christian truth from secondary interpretive differences. Remember that a group studying endurance will contain people who are barely enduring; the tone of the room matters as much as the content.

Using the case studies

The case studies are the heart of each session. Read the situation aloud, then let the group work the questions before you offer a reading of your own. Resist the urge to resolve the case quickly; the value is in the group noticing where a real person's reasoning turned, not in reaching the answer the leader already has.

When needs exceed the group. Serious mental-health concerns, abuse, threats, criminal conduct, and medical emergencies require appropriate professional or legal help. Prayer and pastoral care can accompany such help; they must not be used to delay safety or responsible action.

APPENDIX B

Session Briefs

One brief for the leader before each session. Read the chapter first; these notes assume it.

SESSION 1

The Race We're Actually Running

Hebrews 12:1-3

Aim. Relocate the measure of the Christian life from speed to endurance.

Central doctrine. Perseverance, and the preservation of believers by God.

Likely difficult question. “Can a Christian lose salvation?” Answer from Philippians 1:6 and John 10:27-29 rather than from experience, and do not rush past it.

Case-study emphasis. Ruth measures God’s favor toward her by watching a newer believer. Separate her two questions before discussing anything else.

Prayer focus. Assurance for anyone who feels slow, stalled, or unnoticed.

Notes

SESSION 2

Choosing the Path

Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 14:25-33

Aim. Count the cost honestly, without dramatizing it or minimizing it.

Central doctrine. The lordship of Christ, and salvation by grace that costs everything.

Likely difficult question. “If following Jesus costs everything, is it still grace?” Hold both together without resolving one into the other.

Case-study emphasis. Andre is disappointed with a description of the Christian life he was given, not with Christ. Help the group tell the difference.

Prayer focus. Honesty about the road and gladness about the destination.

Notes

SESSION 3

When Progress Feels Slow

Psalm 13; Isaiah 40:27-31

Aim. Give the group permission to lament, and put biblical words in their mouths.

Central doctrine. Providence, and God’s faithfulness inside delay.

Likely difficult question. “Why has God not answered?” Resist explaining. Point to Luke 18:1-8 and John 11:1-6 and let the tension stand.

Case-study emphasis. Miriam still prays but has stopped asking. Ask what her silence protects.

Prayer focus. Pray Psalm 13 aloud in the first person, then pray for one person by name.

Notes

SESSION 4

Temptation and the Long Fight

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Aim. Move struggle out of secrecy and locate the escape upstream.

Central doctrine. Sin, sanctification, and the faithfulness of God.

Likely difficult question. “If I keep falling, am I really a Christian?” Answer with verse 12 and verse 13 together, never one without the other.

Case-study emphasis. Cal has defined the line far downstream. Notice where concealment begins, not where conduct would.

Prayer focus. Confession without shame. Agree accountability pairs of the same sex, and restate the confidentiality covenant.

Notes

SESSION 5

Suffering That Doesn't Lift

2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 12:7-10

Aim. Break the link between unrelieved suffering and a verdict on the sufferer.

Central doctrine. Providence, sufficient grace, and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

Likely difficult question. "Does God always want to heal?" Pray for healing plainly and for grace to endure just as plainly.

Case-study emphasis. Deborah has stopped asking for prayer. Ask what a church would have to change for her to start again.

Prayer focus. Shorten the teaching and lengthen the prayer. End by arranging practical help, not only intercession.

Notes

SESSION 6

Falling, and Getting Back Up

Proverbs 24:16; John 21:15-19

Aim. Distinguish shame from repentance and make return possible.

Central doctrine. Forgiveness, restoration, and the difference between falling and abandoning the road.

Likely difficult question. "Should someone who did that ever serve again?" Work from Christ's pattern with Peter before discussing policy.

Case-study emphasis. Warren has repented and cannot face the room. Ask who should make the first move.

Prayer focus. Pray for those who have stopped coming back. Decide before the group ends who will make contact this week.

Notes

SESSION 7

The Comparison Trap

John 21:20-22; Psalm 73

Aim. Name comparison plainly and return the group to its own obedience.**Central doctrine.** Calling, contentment, and God's sovereignty in giving different portions.**Likely difficult question.** "Is ambition wrong?" Distinguish diligence in your own work from ranking yourself against another's.**Case-study emphasis.** Joanna's circumstances have not changed; her reasons have. Locate the change.**Prayer focus.** Give thanks by name for the work God has given each person in the room.

Notes

SESSION 8

Habits That Hold You

Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25

Aim. Build practices small enough to survive a bad week, and name what cannot be done alone.**Central doctrine.** The ordinary means of grace and the necessity of the local church.**Likely difficult question.** "Isn't a fixed routine legalism?" Separate the ground of acceptance from the means of growth.**Case-study emphasis.** Theo is failing at design, not devotion. Rebuild his plan around a floor and a re-entry point.**Prayer focus.** Pray for unremarkable weeks. Arrange one act of burden-bearing before the group ends.

Notes

SESSION 9

Aging, and Finishing Well

2 Timothy 4:6-8; Psalm 71

Aim. Name the work of the last stretch and settle where assurance rests.**Central doctrine.** Assurance, and the crown given by a righteous Judge.**Likely difficult question.** "How can I know I will finish?" Return to Chapter 1 and answer from God's keeping, not from a record.**Case-study emphasis.** Gordon is doing the hardest work of his life without counting it. Ask what his church could ask of him.**Prayer focus.** Let the oldest members speak and pray first. Give thanks by name for believers who finished well.

Notes

APPENDIX B

Group Covenant

- We will center our study on Jesus Christ and read Scripture in context.
- We will listen carefully and speak truth with love.
- We will protect appropriate confidentiality while never promising secrecy about danger or abuse.
- We will not treat anyone's slow season as a failure of faith.
- We will make room for questions, grief, repentance, and growth.
- We will pray for one another, follow through on practical help, and honor appropriate boundaries.

Signed by the members of this group

APPENDIX C

Sources & Further Study

The main exposition, case studies, questions, and field guide in this book are original study material. Labeled commentary insights are brief paraphrases of the sources below. They do not imply that the commentators endorse every application in this book. Scripture remains the primary authority for the study.

Sources used

- Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary* — Hebrews 12, Luke 14, Psalm 13, 1 Corinthians 10, 2 Corinthians 4, John 21, Psalm 73, Acts 2, and Psalm 92. Available at biblestudytools.com.
- David Guzik, *Enduring Word Bible Commentary* — the corresponding chapter for each study. Available at enduringword.com.

Both are widely available and broadly Reformed in outlook. Readers who want a wider range should also consult a modern academic commentary and compare where the readings differ.

Further study

Recommendations rather than sources. Nothing below was used in writing this study, and listing a book is not an endorsement of everything in it.

- Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*
- Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*
- Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*
- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*
- J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*
- Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* — on Psalms 13, 71, 73, and 92

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Case studies

The names, characters, and situations in the case studies are fictional and were created to illustrate the teaching. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

A note on scope

This book is offered for Bible study and encouragement. It is not a substitute for medical, psychological, legal, or professional pastoral care, nor for belonging to a local church. Readers facing abuse, threats, crisis, or serious illness should seek appropriate qualified help.

If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, please reach out right now. In the U.S., call or text **988**, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. Outside the U.S. or in immediate danger, contact your local emergency number. You matter, and you do not have to face this alone.

Contact

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STAY THE COURSE.

The Christian life is not about finishing first. It is about walking faithfully with Christ through every season of life.

Spiritual Endurance is a Scripture-centered Bible study designed to help believers remain faithful on the long road of discipleship — through dry seasons, temptation, suffering, failure, comparison, daily habits, and the call to finish well.

— Inside: —

- 9 in-depth chapters
- 45 supporting passages
- Extended case studies
- Reflection and S.O.A.P. journaling pages
- 30-day field guide
- Leader guide & group covenant

Walk the path. Finish faithful.