

# Endure To The End Of What?

by Craig Sablich

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No matter how old we are, everything we have experienced in life, every right or wrong decision, has contributed to the experiences that have shaped who we are at this very moment. As much as we would like, we cannot change or eliminate a bad decision that might have set us on a heart-breaking path. We can only look forward, ask for, and accept the forgiveness, mercy, and love of God.

When I recall the struggles I have faced in life, I sometimes cannot help but consider God's Word, which teaches us to endure. For instance, in II Thessalonians 1:4, the apostle Paul writes, "[W]e ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure." The word "endure" here is *anéchomai* (*Strong's* #0430), defined as "to bear with, to hold oneself erect and firm, to sustain."

Paul provides a bit more detail about this quality of endurance in I Corinthians 13, as he explains the characteristics of love. He writes in verses 6-7 that love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." In verse 7, he uses a more descriptive word for "endures," *hypomeno* (*Strong's* #5278). It means "to take patiently, to suffer, not to recede or flee, to persevere under misfortunes and trials."

For comparison's sake, *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the English word *endure* as "to remain firm under suffering or misfortune without yielding; to put up with something trying or painful; to bear without discomposure or flinching."

**"He Who Endures to the End"**

In Matthew 24:12-13, Jesus adds another component to this idea of enduring: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who *endures to the end* shall be saved” (emphasis ours throughout).

Jesus uses the same word for “endure” in verse 13, *hypomeno*, as Paul did, but we need to consider the word “end” in this verse. When we hear how this is phrased, our mind might be inclined to think of enduring to the end of God’s Plan or the end of the age.

However, here, Jesus uses a word different from what we might expect. “End” in verse 13 is *telos* (*Strong’s* #5056), meaning “termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be.” Greek experts tell us that *telos* always speaks of the end of some act or state, but *not* of the end of a period of time. So, Jesus appears to be speaking of enduring to the end of an event, perhaps some significant occurrence that signals the onset of total lawlessness.

Jesus warns us of the need to endure hard or challenging events. In a broader sense, He could be referring to the end of the daily challenges life presents. In this way, *telos* would apply to something like the end of a job or a graduation at the end of one’s schooling. Maybe it could refer to the heart-breaking end of a relationship or the end of a loved one’s life. It could apply to the end of any number of difficult trials we face each day.

Admittedly, Jesus’ statement causes most people to think of the end of the age, which presents an end that seems a long way off, but there is a problem with thinking this way. Considering an end to be far in the future can lead to complacency, causing us to lose a sense of urgency in growing and making the changes we desperately need to make to our way of life as we grow into God’s image.

We need to be highly confident in the fact that God is always working with us to provide tests and challenges every day so that we can work toward becoming more godly than we are now (see Philippians 2:12-13). But it takes time and many different experiences to begin to see life from a completely different perspective, as God sees it.

In Romans 8:18, Paul speaks of these types of circumstances. Such hard experiences provide a window for us to begin to understand the concept of suffering. He writes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Paul speaks of suffering as if we should expect it to occur, perhaps frequently, which begs the question, “Where is God when His children are suffering?”

This point stays with me. Consider Jacob’s and Joseph’s experiences as examples of the suffering Paul mentioned in Romans 8:18. God is never far away, but the patriarchs suffered for long stretches of their lives before their ordeals were resolved. Their stories impressed upon me the necessity of developing a much deeper level of patience while working through these processes.

### **“All Things Work Together for Good”**

Paul continues his teaching in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” The wording of this promise makes a difference. It is not a promise to everyone but specifically to God’s people.

With this in mind, we need to reflect on all the experiences we, as God’s elect, have gone through in our lives. The trials that we suffered probably felt like punishment or curses. We may have believed it was just what we deserved. We naturally think this way because we tend to consider these experiences in the immediate timeframe in which they occur.

Consider the pattern of experiences Joseph endured. As the favorite child of his father, he felt special, blessed, his father’s beloved son. Then his whole world came crashing down as his brothers showed their contempt for him by throwing him into a pit. Then, he felt hopeful when they pulled him out until he discovered that they had sold him into slavery.

The significant events of this young man's life—lasting from the time he was about 17 until Pharaoh promoted him at around age 30—must have made him feel pulled in every direction emotionally. He probably thought he was indeed cursed. Where was his God?

Jacob expressed this same emotion when his sons explained that Egypt's ruler required his son, Benjamin, to be brought to him. Notice his reply in Genesis 42:36:

And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."

It seems Jacob had forgotten the promise God made to him in Genesis 28:15:

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.

God's promise seems so positive and certain. So, was He with Jacob during his life of trials? When Joseph suffered his severe ups and downs, was God very far off?

Being human as they were, we understand why Jacob would claim, "All these things are against me." It appeared to him on the surface that his life had become a curse. But it was a lie he told himself because he lacked perspective. God always backs what Paul writes in Romans 8:28. We need to comprehend and trust the full extent and magnitude of what is contained in the words "all things work together for good to those who love God." He is involved in every facet of our lives, down to the finest details, every day of our lives.

### **"All Things" Means All Things**

It is imperative for our growth that we make it our goal to navigate mindfully the obstacles we face every minute, every hour, of our day. What is important is not just enduring but *what we are doing while enduring*. We

should be working to make good and sound decisions, avoiding things like gossip, bad attitudes, and behaving with emotionally charged, knee-jerk reactions resulting from a lack of self-control. We need to be asking God constantly to help us always treat others with love and kindness. In short, we must conduct ourselves through each event in the same manner that Christ would.

It is helpful to put ourselves in Jacob's or Joseph's place as he went through his trials. Would we see those events as a blessing, something to rejoice over, or as a curse, some form of horrible punishment?

From my own experiences, I can personally relate to Jacob's and Joseph's emotions. When I went through my recent trial and came to realize my daughters might never live with me again, I was crushed. I could not understand where my Defender was. Where was God? How could He allow this to happen?

But I can remember thinking about God's sovereignty over "all things." Since He is in control, if His will had been that it was best for my girls to remain with me, then that is exactly what would have happened. Then it hit me. If He determined that for the time being—for whatever reason that He had not revealed to me at the time—that my daughters should not live with me, then no matter how hard I fought, I would not get them back.

"All things" were pointing to that being God's determination. What I have had to keep working on every day is understanding that the last page of this story has not been written. During these types of emotional experiences, we need to apply Paul's encouraging statement that all things work for good to the person whom God has called and has accepted in love the relationship He so graciously offers.

But this truth is hard to recognize when in the heat of a fiery trial.

God begins working and shaping events in our lives long before we even realize it. While those events will sometimes cause major emotional reactions, both suffering and joy, He always plans them intending us to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to live as He does.

So, during such a trial, do we step back and open our eyes to see God active in our lives, accepting that our present sufferings are part of the “all things work together for good” in our lives? Do we have faith that God is deeply involved and accept what He has determined is good for us and our loved ones?

Frankly, it is hard to accept. Through my trials, God has shown me that it is what the faith He has given me is for: to accept His will above my own and know that He is working in my life and my daughters’ lives for our good. After all, He loves me more than I can ever love my daughters.

### **Taking the Long View**

What can be hard for us to understand is that God works His plan in years, decades, and centuries, assuring that “all things work together.” Every person’s life impacts the lives of others, and the effects ripple outward, much like the waves across the surface of a pond.

Ultimately, for those whom God has called to join His Family, everything that happens in their lives has a purpose that, in its final outcome, is for their ultimate benefit. God’s providence is involved in the everyday trials of life. His will impacts every area of our lives, everything from peace and contentment to the sacrifices and struggles we face. But it takes time.

How long did it take for “all things to work together for good” for Abraham and Sarah to have a son? How long did it take for those in the wilderness to enter the Promised Land? How long did His people have to wait for the Messiah? The Bible provides us with examples of God’s long-term plans and His working out of events in people’s lives that affect others’ lives, sometimes decades or even centuries later. Is our loving and faithful God not capable of doing the same in our lives?

Improving character is not an easy thing to accomplish. It takes challenging experiences, along with joyful, happy experiences, and then more turmoil, to shape our decision-making and leadership abilities. When it comes to God’s sovereignty over the lives of His children, there is no such thing as a coincidence. God is there and involved, creating and maneuvering circumstances for our good and the good of others.

So, every situation in our lives comes with God's approval. Whatever happens to us, God has either allowed it or caused it to occur. Jesus Christ tells us that walking the narrow path is difficult (Matthew 7:13-14). Seeking the Kingdom of God and freeing ourselves from the world's clutches require many sacrifices.

## **The Story Is Still Being Written**

While putting the final touches on this message, I became aware of a developing situation affecting my daughters, requiring my immediate attention. I needed to move back home as soon as possible, but I had just signed a one-year lease in another city. In addition, I would need to move to a specific school district, but due to a shortage of houses, this was proving impossible.

But after only five weeks from the time I became aware of the situation, I moved into a house within the boundaries of my younger daughter's school district. After three and a half years of minimal contact, both my daughters were there to help me unpack in my new home.

It is almost unbelievable to see how God is showing me that "all things" are still being worked out according to His will. If you doubt God's ability to change your life in the twinkling of an eye, consider this story of one man's life and try to apply it to yours.

We can have absolute confidence, trust, faith, that whatever we are facing today, our Father and His Son are right there with us and will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6). Faith is a major factor in enduring, and we need to apply it constantly to the end.

However, there is another primary ingredient needed to endure every minute of every hour of every day of every trial we face: "[P]ray without ceasing, in everything [all things] give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thessalonians 5:17-18).

Clearly, the last page of my story has not yet been written. Nor has the last page of your story, your trial, your life, been written either. This is why we

can never give up; we have not yet reached “the end.” We must keep fighting and stay patient. Remain close to God and close to the brethren. Keep doing the work to endure to the end of all things.