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Endurance

G. C. Willis

The Greek word *hupomone* is generally translated “patience” in our *Authorized Version*, and “endurance” in the *New Translation* by J. N. Darby. The original meaning of the Greek word is “remaining behind”. It comes from the verb, “I remain behind”, which in Luke 2:43 is translated this way.

The Meaning of the Word Endurance

We find a very beautiful example of this word in the lovely story of Shammah in the field of lentils in 2 Samuel 23:11 -12. “After him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentils; and the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines; and the Lord wrought a great victory.”

Shammah “remained behind”. Shammah “endured”. There are, perhaps, few things more difficult than to endure. When others have given up, to remain behind is not easy. I suppose Shammah’s friends and fellow soldiers told him it was hopeless. It was certain death to stay where he was, and anyway, for a field of lentils it was not worth remaining behind. I suspect David had given that field of lentils to Shammah to defend. And you and I have been given a field of lentils to defend, in the midst of which “great David’s Greater Son” has placed us. Our field of lentils may be our home, or the office, or the shop; it may be the little feeble company of two or three gathered to our Lord’s own Name, that others have despised and forsaken for something greater and more attractive. Our field of lentils may not seem worth defending, and we may feel like giving up; or perhaps we are turning our eyes to fields that seem to us more attractive and more worthwhile. Let us remember Shammah, who remained behind when the others fled. Let us endure, as he endured.

Our God is called “The God of Endurance” and “The God of Encouragement” (Rom. 15:5 N. T.). Many years ago some kind friends were urging a young man to give up some work the Lord had given him to do. He went in his perplexity to a dear old brother. He will never forget the way the older man exclaimed: “Give up? All giving up is of the devil!” Yes, our God is “the God of Endurance.” I suppose every Christian is willing to “boast in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2 N. T.); but how many of us can truthfully add: “And not only (that), but we also boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works endurance”? The word *tribulation* comes from the Latin word “tribulum”, a flail. The flail I used when I was a boy was a cruel looking instrument, made of

**“ The word
endurance never
means the spirit
which sits with
folded hands and
simply bears
things. It is
victorious
endurance,
masculine
constancy under
trial...It is the
ability to bear
things, which
enables a man to
pass the breaking
point and not to
break and to greet
the unseen with
strength.”**

J. Oswald Sanders
(1902-1996)

two sticks of wood fastened together at the ends with a thong. You held one of the sticks, swinging it so that the other came down with terrific force on the wheat. The result was that the chaff and straw were blown away, while the wheat remained. The wheat endured. The flail brought tribulation to it, right enough, but by that tribulation the wheat obtained endurance.

Temptations and Endurance

It may be you have been having some pretty heavy blows with the flail. You may feel that you have been having more than your share of tribulation. May the God of endurance give you to boast in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation works endurance. You will have noticed the way James opens his epistle. Immediately after the greeting, he plunges straight into his subject. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various *temptations*" (*peirasmos*, an experiment, a trial, a testing, a temptation). We are put into the crucible, like the chemists do to the substances they are testing. "Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, knowing that the proving of your faith works endurance." Ellicott says: "In the noble word *hupomone* there always appears in the New Testament a background of *andreia* (manliness)...it does not mark merely the endurance, but the perseverance,...the *brave* patience with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the inward and the outward world."

Yes, endurance is so precious, and of inestimable value, that we may count it all joy when we fall into trials, because we know they work endurance. "But let endurance have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-3). And the passage we looked at in Romans says, "We also boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works endurance and endurance, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed." Yes, endurance works experience. This is experience, and it was endurance taught it. Do you think Shammah would have missed the experience he gained by that fight in the lentil field? Never! And when we get Home, we will see that some of these hard places on the road were the bits we would not have missed for anything. They worked endurance.

The Spiritual Value of Endurance

The first mark of a true servant of God is "endurance". "In everything commending ourselves as God's ministers (or, servants), in much endurance" (2 Cor. 6:4). The false servant, the hireling, fled when he saw the wolf coming; but the Good Shepherd "remained behind". He endured. Endurance was also the first sign of an apostle. "The signs indeed of the apostle were wrought among you in all endurance..." (2 Cor. 12:12).

Years ago my work took me to the woods in the north of Canada, far from any Christian services. One Lord's Day morning I was reading the first chapter of Colossians. I got as far as the eleventh verse, and I read: "Strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory..." and I stopped there, somewhat overwhelmed by the stupendous display of mighty power. As I stopped, I dreamed of the great deeds I would some day do for the Lord, with all this mighty power on which I might so freely draw; what crowds might be converted; how the heathen might be won for Christ! I decided to finish the verse: "Strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory *unto all endurance and long-suffering*

"God's intention in allowing our faith to be tested is to produce endurance. The author of Proverbs wrote: *If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small* (Prov. 24:10). God is in the business of building up strong Christian men and women who can persevere in hard times without fainting."

Zane Hodges

Author and former N. T. Greek Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary

with joy". It was a bit of a shock, for in those days I had never thought very much of endurance, or of patience either, as it is put in our English Bible. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts; and God knows the true worth of endurance, and just the power that is needed for it, especially when "long-suffering" is needed; and when this endurance is not done through self-pity, but "with joy".

God's Divine Enablement for Endurance

Oh, my brothers, my sisters, you will find you do indeed need to be "strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory," if you are to have "all endurance and long-suffering with joy". We never, never can do it in our own strength; but thanks be to God, He does not ask us to use our own strength. He offers us all this vast store of power on which to freely draw, with unlimited demands, and all for the sake of *endurance*, "Endurance and long-suffering with joy". It is not easy, but, thank the Lord He can do it for us; He can work it in us. The apostle used to boast about the *endurance* of his dear children in faith, the Thessalonian Christians. "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and *endurance of hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ"(1 Thess. 1:3). And their endurance kept up, for in the second Epistle we find he is still boasting of it. "Your faith increases exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all towards one another abounds; so that we ourselves make our boast in you in the assemblies of God for your *endurance* and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations, which ye are sustaining" (2 Thess 1:4). They had the real genuine thing; their *endurance* did not break down.

There are some things that pursue us, *press after us*. The things that press after us are very often troubles (not always: for goodness and mercy are among the things that very earnestly press after us, as well as other good things). But we are to press after quite a lot of things. You find a list of some of them in 1 Timothy 6:11-12; and amongst these you will find *endurance*. These days are apt to be soft days, and we do not like to endure hardness if we can help it; but remember, it is not wealth, nor ease, nor comfort, nor learning we are to press after; but endurance, as well as many other blessed graces.

The Charge for More Endurance

The apostle could say to Timothy, his son in the faith, "Thou hast been thoroughly acquainted with my...endurance"(2 Tim. 3:10). Yes, Timothy knew how Paul had remained behind when John Mark gave up and deserted him; he knew how Paul had endured when Peter gave up the truth at Antioch, and all the others with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away: but Paul remained behind in the true faith. And in 2 Timothy 4:16 the old apostle, Paul the aged, tells his child in the faith how "all deserted me." But Paul endured, he remained behind, and faced Nero alone;¹ "and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth." Few there are indeed who have endured like Paul, and few were acquainted with his endurance like Timothy.

Paul tells Titus that the "elder men" were to have endurance, though this would indeed include patience. It may be that as we get older we learn to value this quality more. The urge and recklessness of youth have passed away, perhaps. But, thank the Lord, endurance is one quality we old folks (who are not good for much) may, and should, have. Keep on in the race, dear old friend; the goal is almost in sight. "Press toward the the mark!" Endure! Hebrews 10:36 tells us we have need of endurance in order that, having done the will of God, we may receive the promise. We can see "the streaks in the sky, His coming is near."

**"Persevere!
Keep running!
Hold out to the
end! Do not
give up or be
disheartened!
Never look
back, but press
on toward the
mark! With the
same freshness
as you began at
the starting-
point, remain
steadfast until
the goal."**

Erich Sauer

Author, scholar, and former
president of Wiedenest
Bible College in Germany

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Correspondence should be sent to:

BIBLE & LIFE Newsletter
c/o David Dunlap
3116 Gulfwind Drive
Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
(813) 996-1053

e-mail
DavidDunlap@earthlink.net
website

www.biblefellowship.org/BibleAndLife/

Endurance with Eternity in View

"The Bright and Morning Star" will soon appear, and make good all the promises. But now, in the darkest part of the night, just before the dawn, "You have need of endurance." And those who have endured, we call happy. "Ye have heard of the patience (endurance) of Job, and seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful"(James 5:11). Sweet attributes are these to link with endurance. It did not look like tender compassion and pity in the early chapters of Job. But it is true for Job, and it is true for us. Tribulation did work endurance, and if we let it, tribulation will work endurance for us, too. We also will prove the Lord to be "full of tender compassion and pitiful."

And in that famous addition sum of Peter (2 Peter 1:5-6), we find our word once again: endurance! "...to our faith add courage; to our courage add knowledge; to our knowledge add self-control; to our self-control add *endurance*; and to endurance add brotherly affection; and to our brotherly affection add love." May God help us so to do.

"Let us, therefore, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us, *run with endurance* the race that lies before us, looking steadfastly on Jesus, the leader and completer of faith: who, in view of the joy lying before Him, *endured the cross*, having despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For *consider well Him who endured* so great contradiction of sinners against Himself, that ye be not weary, fainting in your minds" (Heb. 12:1-3). ENDURE HARDNESS as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

1. Editor note -"the Lion", Greek commentators generally understood the lion to be Nero. Josephus states that the death of Tiberius was the death of the lion. However, in the Greek text the definite article is absent, which renders the idea improbable. Paul uses this common metaphorical expression to indicate deliverance from danger. W. E. Vine, *2 Timothy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965), p. 149

From G. C. Willis, *Hid Treasures*,(Kowloon, Hong Kong: Christian Book Room),p.98-108

About the author. G. C. Willis along with his wife and family went to China as missionaries in 1921; during World War II they were imprisoned in a Japanese concentration camp. By much personal suffering, he learned endurance and through tribulation, patience.

