

Strength and Endurance in our Christian Walk

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[0:00] As we get started though, I'd really like you to spend a little bit of time marveling at this picture. Go ahead and kill the lights, Bryce. Look at that picture. Isn't that awesome?

Does anybody else see a tree hanging on by its fingertips? Right? I think in many ways this is a great picture of what we're going to be looking at today.

We're going to be taking a look at strength and endurance in our Christian walk. And in many ways it's typified by this tree.

Look at, I mean, obviously this is on a tidal shore, so probably an ocean. And you can see that for some reason all of the under support has washed out.

But yet this tree not only has roots supporting it in firm ground, but it's still full of life. And I think that's important.

[1:03] As we read today, this will stand out. But if you've got your Bibles open by now to Romans chapter 15, we're going to read the first seven verses.

We, who are strong, have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2:18] Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. And as we take a look at this passage today, the key thing that is presented here is this.

That we are to glorify God with one voice. Now, I can just see some of my students in today's past. Oh, Pastor James, Pastor James. What about the mute? Thank you for bringing that up. When it says voice here, it's not limited just to that which we say.

It's speaking about the message or the voice of our lives. It's the deeds, the actions, the thoughts. It is how we live this life.

Everything that we do, everything that we say, even the things that are going on in the squirrel cage between our ears, needs to be pointed to giving glory to God.

[3:26] Now, it sounds really easy, isn't it? Okay. Thanks. Good. Go glorify God. But while simple, there are many things which tend to cause problems with this.

You know, little things like the death of a loved one. Kind of hard to glorify God, right? When your heart's broken. How about the social pressures that we live under?

All the people around us that are judging us. Oh. My wife and I nearly drove off the road yesterday as we drove by City Hall with its pride flag.

You know? How about this? How about daily needs? I like to eat. Can I get a praise of the Lord from anybody else in here?

You know? And to eat, you know, most people appreciate it if you actually pay for the food that you're eating, which means that you have to have money to pay for the food, which means you have to have a job or be on the government, which is worse.

[4:32] You know, you just, you got to, you got needs you got to take care of. Like yesterday, I sent my wife into town. I asked her to bring me toothpaste. Because brushing your teeth is something you got to do.

The daily needs. Oh. Nobody here has ever had family that's caused them problems with glorifying God. Amen.

Right? Every time we get together as a family, it's just a praise fest, right? No rumble in the living room, right? Family can get in the way. Or just the everyday, run-of-the-mill occurrences.

That happen in a sin-broken world. Glorify the Father with one voice. Sounds really simple. But there's nothing easy about it.

It is simple. But it's not easy. And that's okay because God's got a plan. And as we take a look here in Romans chapter 15, there's some things that God has laid out for us to help us as we, the body of Christ, come together to lift our voice in unison to bring glory to God.

[5:48] And take a look in verse 1 of chapter 15. We who are strong. Now, we talked about this in chapter 14.

You know, the strong are not to take advantage of the weak. They're to help them out. They're not to judge. We're supposed to lift one another up. We're supposed to... There is this idea of strength. Right? And we see this idea of strength being repeated here in chapter 15. And I just want to start off by saying this. While no one ever wants to be the weak link, let's be honest.

Each and every one of us has been the weak link at one point in time in our life. You know? We all want to be that iconic man, you know, that everybody can call upon to depend upon, you know. But let's be honest. There's times where we're not that. There are ladies who want to always have the perfect home, you know, where it's always okay for visitors to show up because the place is neat and clean.

[6:57] The children are all washed and sitting quietly doing schoolwork. And there's the smell of fresh baked chocolate chip cookies. But is that the way it always is in your house?

I happen to live in a house which is a little bit more real than that, you know? We all want to be that strong paragon of strength where others lean upon us and we never need anybody else.

But the reality is each and every one of us at times in our life is the weak link. So in this passage, when you read this, those who are strong have an obligation to help with the failings of the weak.

If you're to actually break... I actually looked it up in the Greek language. Yeah, I did good work this week. And they both come from the same root that means power.

Dunamis. You know, it's the root word that we end up with like dynamite. Right? But dunamis or dunami, it is the idea of strength, power, ability, the can do.

[8:07] Romans chapter 1 verse 16 has the same concept. I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

It's that same concept of power. You want to know what the weak means? They do this little thing. It's an A with an apostrophe in front of it.

And what it means is not. Okay? So you've got dunamis, which means strong. And then you've got this little A apostrophe dunamis, which means not very strong at all.

Not able. Not capable. No power. And so what it's saying here is we who have power, we who have ability, we who have the skill set have an obligation to those who don't have any power, who don't have any strength, who don't have the skills necessary.

We have the obligation. And when we take a look at this, you need to know something. Strength doesn't just happen. It's not like you can spend your entire life eating Twinkies and Ding Dongs while playing video games and then get a phone call from your buddy.

[9:33] Hey, can you help me move and have the physical strength to go pick up the piano? Right? You can't go from doing nothing and think that you're going to be all powerful.

It involves work. Now, to be honest, each of us has God-given abilities, but true strength is the result of work, of consistent hard work, often reached through rigorous, painful repetitions.

Right? Anybody here know what the Internet is or ever watch the Internet? I know, I know. It's way evil and we would never look at it.

I love the videos. If you see these bodybuilders, you know, that have never passed a gold gym without spending three hours and, you know, and then you see the construction worker. And they have strength contests, you know, and you've got Billy Buff over here who looks like Hercules. And then you've got Johnny Shovelslinger.

[10:40] You know who usually wins? Johnny Shovelslinger. Because he's done real work. He's out digging ditches all day. He's out making things all day. He's got muscles that have, versus I just pump to be big.

And that's the way it is in real life. Do you want to have strength in real life? It's not, I puff my chest up and look good.

I do the work. Do you know what that means in Christian ministry? I act compassionately. I treat people with kindness.

When people step on my toes, I try and see what I can do for them instead of seeing what I can do to them. I just want to take a time out for a minute and just say thank you to the church body today. Thank you for calling me and letting me know about last week. Thank you to the ladies that took food. Those of you that don't know, our next door neighbor, our church next door neighbor, passed away and was discovered during Sunday school last week.

[11:58] There were sirens my wife and I heard and they stopped because they were going next door. And this church, at my request, took meals to this family during this week.

Thank you. That's, I mean, we don't know. They've never been here. They've never, well, the guy who died, he'd been here a couple of times just to talk to me, but they've never attended.

They don't come to our events. They're not part of our church family. For us as a church family, not only to reach out, but to go over there and show love, that is how you develop Christian strength. You go outside your comfort zone doing godly things. See, and it's the repetition of that. Okay, okay, okay, okay.

How many of you enjoy going over there to meet people you don't know because they've had a horrible accident and terrible things are going on? No. Just about every person said, I don't want to do this.

[12:59] And I said, please, okay. And that's great. I don't want to do that either. There's nothing fun in sitting down with the spouse of someone who unexpectedly passed away.

That's not fun. That's ministry. That's exercise. exercise. That's developing strength. And as you do that and as you practice that, you get more and more able so that you can actually go in there, and instead of just getting through it, you go there and you add benefit.

And pretty soon people feel comfortable with the fact that you're there. And people receive peace and blessing because you are there, because you've developed strength. Nobody wants to be the weak link.

Nobody really wants to go through all the hard work to get strength, but that's what we need to do. If you want to have true strength, you've got to do the work. All right. Let's see. Oh, yeah.

Strength comes through work, musical ability, artistic grace, the power of knowing God's word. All of these things have to be practiced, have to be strengthened. But there's something else.

[14:11] There's a word in here. It's a word that is not very well thought of in our society today.

It's denied. It is run away from. It is, and that's the word obligation. Those who can, that is those who have power, are obligated to help those who don't.

That doesn't sound right, does it? Hey, preacher boy, you understand I put in the work. They had the opportunity to put in the work.

I put in the work. Now, they're in a hole, and they don't know what to do, but I'm strong, and I'm capable, and you're telling me that I am obligated to go help them? No, I'm not telling you that at all. God is. Read verse 1. We who are strong have an obligation, a duty.

[15:25] We have a requirement laid upon us. You know how some people avoid this? They do the monkey thing. Hear no problem, see no problem, talk about no problem.

I didn't see it. I didn't hear nothing, right? And so they think that they've got no obligation. You think God's fooled by that? No. We have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

Let each of us please his neighbor. Okay, let's stop for a second. Please. The idea of please is not to make somebody happy. What it really means is to have a good relationship with, to be an encouragement, to be able to get along.

Have you ever been with somebody that it's fun to hang out with? There are people in this world that are just hilarious and enjoyable to be with. And then there's people like me.

Arr. You know, kind of grouchy, not always fun. They're just not a lot of fun. Well, we are to be pleasant people to be with so that we can encourage others.

[16:32] That's what it means. All right. So here is it. We are strong, have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

Oh, here it is. Verse 3. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

For Christ did not please, I am truly impressed by the faith of some of the people in this room.

I am truly impressed by the strength and their endurance in serving the Lord. Your faithfulness is beyond me.

But even you needed Christ. Even you were lost in your sin and hell bound.

[17:38] And if Christ hadn't left glory and paid the penalty of our sin, even the greatest among us would be going to hell. But because Christ loved us, he willingly sacrificed himself for us.

So yes, we are obligated to help others. For Christ is our example. Okay? Everybody's all, oh, I got real heavy real fast.

It did. And that's okay. Because we're talking about real world things here. So we start off with this, with the help of the strong. And remember, what's our goal? Our goal is to be unified in one voice, bringing glory to God.

Okay? And in that process, we have those that are good singers and can carry a tune. And then we have those whose buckets have holes.

All right? But yet, together we are to sing and bring glory to God. Together, in our lives, we are to bring glory to God. Some of us are better at it. Some of us are worse at it.

[18:48] But no matter if we're great, or if we're normal, or if we're like, could you please sing a little bit lower? You know, it doesn't matter what scale we are. We struggle.

We strain. There is bumps in the road. There's hard things. And God has given us, in this passage, some helps. And he says, look at verse 4.

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction. Our instruction in what? In bringing glory to God. Okay? Through instruction.

That through endurance, as well as through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. So, there's two things that we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about endurance.

And we're going to talk about encouragement. And that's kind of why I picked this tree. Okay?

[19:50] I love this tree because, to me, this is the picture of strength and endurance. All right? Can you imagine this tree as a young sapling? If it was a young sapling, it would not, and that hole was there, it couldn't have grown there.

There had to be some dirt there for it to start. But as it grew, the ground underneath it washed out. And it had to hold on to the cliffs on either side.

And look how big that tree is. And you can find hundreds and hundreds of pictures of this on the Internet. I mean, it's a... People who take photographs know about this tree, right? Because it's been there a while.

Because it's enduring. And to do that, it has to have strength. Because think of... Have you ever been to the coast? Storms, wind, rain, waves.

And yet that tree is still going strong. Let's talk about endurance. The strength to continue in the face of persecution and temptation.

[21:00] Endurance is the ability to continue on. Physical endurance is the ability to keep walking, to keep moving, to keep going.

Emotional endurance is to stand up against the abuse and the slander. Spiritual abuse is to remain strong in our faith even when others aren't.

That's what endurance is. The endurance is the dunami to remain steadfast. When all the weights and pressures come against you, the temptations, the power to stand fast.

But if we look at this passage, here it calls for more than just having endurance. It cries out for living endurance.

It calls us to faithfully live for Christ. That through endurance, the idea here is, we are to put our faith into action.

[22:11] You know, it's one thing to be able. It's another thing to get the job done. There's jokes about engineers who figure out how things can be done and different people who look at it.

And then those people that actually go out and get the job done, right? We're to be those people that get the job done. To live faithfully. To be that person that others can depend upon.

Lean upon in the struggles and storms of life. We are to do it. It's not just enough to have that. We need to put it in place. All right.

I've got two examples that I want to share with you. Number one is Noah. And number two is Moses. I want you to think of Noah.

In Genesis chapter 6, it says that God looked upon humanity. And every intent of their heart was evil. But that Noah found favor in God's sight.

[23:25] He was the faithful man of his generation. Can you imagine a world where only you were a believer?

Let's give Noah a break. Let's say that Noah and his immediate family. Because we know three of his kids and their spouses.

Noah's wife, three kids and spouse got on the ark. So let's say those eight people. Led by Noah. We're the only people on the globe.

Living for God. You want to talk about endurance? How about spending a hundred years on one project? A hundred years.

And the neighbor's going, you know, day one, you're out there cutting down a tree. Hey, Noah, what you working on? Building a boat. Oh, that's nice. Day 300. Noah, that's a big boat.

[24:26] You know? And the whole time you're preaching to them, look, God is unhappy. We have become sinful. And God is going to judge the world with a flood. And every day, every one of them denies you.

And yet, what does it say about Noah? He was faithful in his generation. That's endurance. Why was Noah faithful in his generation?

It might have helped that he had a goal. You know, survive the coming flood. As he's building the ark.

Being faithful. You know? He had a goal. He had an objective. There was something that he was pointed towards. How about Moses? You know Moses.

Moses. Led the nation of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness. Because they were. A stiff neck. Hard hearted. Blessed people of God.

[25:34] You know? How many times has it said the people rebelled? Do you remember? At one point in time, God wanted to kill all of Israel. Said, I'm going to kill them all. I'm going to start over with you, Moses.

Moses. And Moses said, no, no, don't do that. Don't do that. You know? It'd make you. And God listened to Moses. And God led the nation.

Why do you think Moses would faithful? Now, we all know that Moses struck the rock. And so he didn't get to go into the promised land. I think one bad day out of 40 years of putting up with what was going on there.

Really, really good. Incredible endurance. How could he do that? He knew the truth.

He knew he wasn't going into the promised land, but he still knew the truth. Who God was. What God had called upon him. And so he was faithful to that. I think if you're going to have great endurance, you need to have a goal.

[26:36] My goal is to set a good example for my children. My goal is to be a good husband to my wife. My goal is to serve this body of believers.

My goal is someday, some of those people I share my faith with are going to turn to God and stop their journey towards hell. That's a goal of mine.

And that's why I do what I do. And I know the truth. The only place that you're going to find truth is in Christ. Where else am I going to go?

I'm a truth guy. I like the truth. You know what endurance lets you do? 2 Timothy 4, verse 7. Apostle Paul says this. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

[27:40] I have kept the faith. The only way you get to say that is through endurance. And the best way that I can think of right now to encourage you in endurance is to set goals and to cling to the truth.

But in Romans 15, it's not just endurance. It says, verse 4, For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

And I want to talk about encouragement a little bit. When I was a youngster, I used to jump out of bed, I mean at the crack of dawn every day, and I was just full of energy.

Go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go. I mean, laps around the house sort of energy. Mom infuriating, teacher destroying energy.

I mean, literally, I'm in the service. And we're doing a 20-mile ruck march. And I've got a 40-pound ruck on. I've got all my gear, you know.

[28:55] I start out with one set of gear. By the time we get to the end, I've got a ruck on top of my ruck. I've got a ruck on my chest. And I've got five rifles. And I was just, no, there was no stop.

I was like, yay, because I was full of energy. Now, go ahead. No, I'm good. Sure, you can carry my, you know. I don't have all that energy that I, you know.

But what was it that gave me that power to go? You know, what was the motivation? For me, it was hyperactivity. Bounce, bounce, bounce, bounce. You know, I just had so much energy.

But what is it that motivates you today? Have you ever played sports? Sports, some people need coach walking up to them and going, bink, in their derriere to get them to move.

You know, yeah, I'm on the team, but, you know, I don't. Okay, we're doing wind sprints. I mean, coach gives me wind sprints, and I'm like, yeah, because I just had that much energy. You know, give people homework in school.

[29:58] How many of you like that? Especially math homework. Remember when I was going for my master's degree, and I would spend all day in the library.

I would do not only the 80 problems that were assigned to us by the instructor, but I'd do the other 80 that hadn't been assigned. And it would, boy, it would make people mad.

Because I'd go into class, and I'd go, yeah, yeah, I got all those. What about this one? And all the other students were like, that one wasn't assigned. I said, but you could do it.

You know, we're here to learn. You know, we want to be better. They're like, leave us alone. What motivates you? Do you need somebody standing on the sideline with pom-poms and a short skirt going, yay, team?

You know, do you need somebody at the end of the line with a trophy? Do you need money? What is it that you need to encourage you? Well, some people need to be encouraged.

[31:05] They need to be, add up, boy, Jimmy, you can do it. Others need to be, you know, get over there and get her done private or I'm going to, you know.

The Bible has, I got four forms of encouragement. One is comfort. Let's start off with that. The Bible encourages us in comfort.

Isaiah chapter 1. Where is it? Oops, went to Ecclesiastes. Isaiah chapter 1, verse 18.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

That's comfort. You know, when you stand before a holy God and you realize that you're not holy at all.

[32:17] When God speaks truth and you realize you're nothing but lies. When your sins are as scarlet, God offers forgiveness.

You can turn to Him today and be forgiven. There's nothing to hold that back. What a great comfort. We were talking in Sunday school today.

When we turn to God, that which in Isaiah, the scarlet has been turned white. When we turn to God, we are forgiven.

We talked about this last Sunday in this message. When we are forgiven, we are forgiven. We're judged by God.

See, this is the process of salvation. The Holy Spirit comes up to you and says, Amen. You don't measure up to God's standard. And it's a little bit more complicated than that, you know, but you come to the point in time where you realize, Dude, I'm a sinner.

[33:18] I need salvation. And when you come to that point in time and you turn to God, God judges you. Now, it's not the judgment that's going to happen in the end times.

You're turning to God and you're begging for mercy in that judgment. And because you're doing it at this time, when it says it's okay to, what He says is He brings you into the throne, your account into the throne room of God.

And He says, I am going to judge you. And Jesus says, I paid His penalty. And God applies the sacrifice of Christ unto you, and you are judged. Do you realize you will never be judged for your sins again?

Ever! That's encouraging. Though your sins be as scarlet, they'll be white as snow.

That's encouragement. How can I get out there and do what I'm doing when I've done such heinous things in the past? Because I have been forgiven. We've got comfort.

[34:19] We've also got consolation. Oh my goodness. Psalm 23. I know you all know this one. It's a great psalm.

I'm going to read it. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Great comforting words.

[35:26] In the midst of the... When we stand in the valley of the shadow of death, either ours, as our life comes to an end, or as we are there with others who are dying, God's comfort is with us.

There are days where everything stinks. Nothing goes right. You break your shoelaces. The tire falls off.

The engine blows up. The wife yells at you. The kids get kicked out of school. And you're still supposed to pay the bills. Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies.

I shall never leave you nor free thank you. We find great consolation and comfort in God's Word. How do I get up in the morning when I have just had the worst day of my life?

How do I get up and go out and serve God? By the encouragement of the Scriptures. By God's faithfulness to His promises.

[36:42] By God putting His arm around me and saying, Okay, Todd, let's go today. It's not just comfort.

It's not just consolation. But there's also the encouragement of exhortation. Galatians 6, verse 1. This is more of the staff sergeant to raw recruit.

This is more of the take my foot and go tink and get you to move type. It says, Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual, restore Him in a spirit of gentleness.

Dang it! I wanted that. I didn't need that last little bit, right? God gives us directives. He says, Look, I got work for you to do. Go do it! And do it with a good attitude.

And there's days where you sit down and you're like, Oh, my God. Okay. I just finished loading a full cord of wood on the back of my truck and my cutting partner hasn't done anything.

[38:03] He's literally just barely finished cutting up the rounds.

They're not even near the road yet. They're just... And you know how tired I am? But what do I got to do?

I need to borrow my wife's lipstick to put a smile on my face. You know? And then I go and I roll his wood up into his truck. I load it. I put a smile on my face and do it.

Do I want to do it? I'm not really. I'm kind of a lazy person. But am I called to do it? Yeah. Help those. Be motivation.

Get off your butt and go do it. I don't want to. I believe you. Does that mean I don't have to do it?

No. Have you ever said that to somebody?

I don't want to do it. And they said, that's great. Go do it anyways. Yeah. And then finally, there is the entreaty. Romans 13.12.

[39:04] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, nor in sexual immorality and sensually, not in quarreling and jealousy.

This is the call. This is the work that needs to be done. Let's get it done. It's different than exhortation.

Exhortation is, get her done. Right? Go. Do it now. This is more of, here's an opportunity for you to serve. This is kind of what happened this last week when I received a phone call about our next door neighbor.

And I spoke to my wife and I said, let's, let's ask the ladies to take some food over. Give them the opportunity. We didn't call them up and say, you will be delivering this on, no, we didn't do that.

What we did is, would you please help out? That's entreaty. And there's sometimes where we just need to hear the call. There's sometimes we just need somebody to show us the opportunity.

[40:07] That's all the encouragement that we need. Our purpose is to, with one voice, as a unified body of Christ, give glory to God.

We are to do it steadfastly with great endurance. And we are to take a look, especially through the scriptures, for the encouragement to keep doing it.

Interestingly enough, look at verse 4 again. It says, whatever is written in former days was written for our instruction, and that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

You know, if I was really good, I'd have a great finishing point on hope, but I'm not going to do that this week because I want to do it next week. So I want to tell you, I want to wrap up with this.

I look at that tree, and I wonder what it was like as its support was removed, as it realized it was all alone.

[41:29] And if it was going to survive, it was going to have to dig in deep. And I think of our faith, and I think of our Christian walk. I think of the call that we have to bring glory to God in our lives, to lift our unified voice up to glorify God.

And I have to be honest. When my time comes, and that time comes for all of us, when people look back on my life, I want them to say that I lived like a friend of Daniel.

You remember Daniel's friends? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Remember those guys?

They, with Daniel, were brought from Israel to Babylon.

They were trained, and they were raised up to be the leaders of the people because they were so smart and so wise. But one day, the king made an idol, big idol. He said, every time you hear the music, bow down and give worship.

And they said, no, because they were faithful to God. And do you know what happened? They started playing the music, and everybody else hit the deck, and these three friends stood together.

[42:55] They were brought before the king, and they were given an opportunity. You're going to hear the music. I'm not going to kill you if you bow. And they said, no.

Well, our God is able. And even if he isn't able, even if he doesn't save us, we will not bow to you. One of my all-time favorite Bible stories, because it's a true account of men who gave their lives to God, and who with great strength and endurance raised one of the greatest odes to God.

My God is able. And even if he chooses not, I will still serve him. That's what I want my life to be.

I want my life to be faithful. When I look around me, and everybody else is hitting the deck, and they're worshipping that, or they're serving that, I want to be faithful to my God.

I want to have great endurance. I want to have the strength that others can call upon at any time. I want to be willing to do the work, so that when the time comes, and everything goes flat around me,

I can stand tall for God.

[44:38] That's who I want to be. Who do you want to be? Let's pray. God,