

**RUNNING TO THE TAPE**  
4<sup>th</sup> in a Series Called “Fireside” on the Pandemic  
1 Corinthians 10:13

A couple of months ago, back in the good old days when we actually were allowed out of our houses, we went with Toby and Anna and their girls to the San Diego Safari Park. Little did we know that in the near future such treats as those would become unavailable. I don't have a favorite animal, but the most awesome that day were the tigers. One of them let out a couple of roars that practically shook the nearby buildings. But I do have to say that one animal that always impresses me is the cheetah. Several times during the day they have a demonstration of that animal's speed. They have an enclosed run where a cheetah does its equivalent of the 100 yard dash. It is astounding how fast they are. I'm told they can run up to 70 miles per hour. They can accelerate from a standing start to almost 50 miles per hour in two seconds. It makes you wonder why the cheetah is not the king of the jungle, the apex predator. Yes the size, strength and ferocity of lions and tigers is awesome. But all athletes know that speed kills. What animal could get away from a predator that runs 70 miles per hour?

But there is one catch. They can sprint at dizzying speed, but they can only do it for very brief spurts. They quickly run out of gas. They have to catch their prey with that first burst of speed, or they have to move on to another menu item. They lack endurance.

This pandemic has really gotten tiresome, hasn't it? It feels like we are in a movie that is a cross between an apocalyptic disaster movie and *Groundhog Day*. We all just want it to end. We now know that this is not a sprint. It won't help us if we can dash through events at 70 miles per hour if we run out of gas after a quick burst of speed. The key here is endurance. Let's think about what God says about that.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

**PREMISE: ENDURANCE IS IMPORTANT**

This verse is in the context of a three-chapter-long discussion that began in 1 Corinthians 8 of how we should deal with differences of opinions. How should followers of Jesus negotiate a disagreement of convictions? You can boil Paul's answer down to one brief summary answer that's in 1 Corinthians 10:24. “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” What is most important is not that you win,

that you get your way and you get to do what you think is best or right. Rather it is that you give up yourself and love and serve the person with whom you disagree.

This is a radical approach to disagreements. What matters in the conflict is not how it turns out, not who wins and who loses, but that we love and serve the other person. This is an approach that will take the heat out of any conflict. Let's imagine a marital dustup. By the way, this is pure fiction. Nothing like this has happened in our family. But if I wasn't married to the best person I've ever known it could have. Mr. and Mrs. Christian have the evening off and want to relax and watch some TV. In this hypothetical situation Mr. Christian, who is a red blooded sports loving American man, has, against his own volition, given up watching sports for Lent. Actually he has been forced to give up sports because there aren't any to watch. He's like a man who hasn't eaten a bite of food in three weeks. He is starving for sports. He sees that ESPN is broadcasting a replay of a football game between the Los Angeles Rams and the Kansas City Chiefs that took place in 2018. He knows that this is one of the most exciting games ever played, and turns it on to watch, happy to have a game to watch, even if it is reheated leftovers. Mrs. Christian loves her husband, but also knows that he has maybe a blind spot in his addiction to sports. She is not happy with his decision to turn on this football game. It's April, not football season. And this is a rerun of a game that happened a year and a half ago. She has a hard time being interested in watching football to begin with, and watching a rerun of a game is definitely a bridge too far. She says to Mr. Christian, "You're not actually going to watch that, are you?" He says, "Yes, I'm kind of excited about it. I haven't been able to watch any sports at all, and this was a great game." She says, "Do you really expect me to sit here with you and watch this? I think you should consider that maybe God has taken sports away from you for a while because they are way too important to you, and they have no spiritual significance at all." Mr. Christian says, "Oh, and I suppose you have something that you would like to watch?" She says, "Yes, I was thinking we could watch *The Bachelor* together." Mr. Christian says, "Are you kidding me? That garbage? You think I have a problem? I think you need to consider what God thinks about what goes on in that show." And the battle is engaged. What happens to that battle if Mr. Christian remembers 1 Corinthians 10:24? No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. He says, "You know, honey, what I really want is to love you. So let's watch something else, something you'd like. Even if it's an abomination like that disgusting cattle call show, *The Bachelor*." End of conflict. No, he didn't get to watch his football game. But he got something far more important. He got to love his wife and received her gratitude and admiration for his kindness as well. (Plus, he *could* record the game so he could watch it at another time...)

In that context Paul wrote these words. He said God will not allow you to be tempted, to be tested, beyond what you can bear. What does being tempted have to do with giving yourself up to love another in the heat of a conflict? Well, we all know that giving up self day in and day out is hard. We are tempted to say, “What about me? When do I get what I want? When is it his or her turn to sacrifice for me?” We think if we live this way we’ll never get what we desire and life will become drudgery as we toil away, being taken advantage of.

The promise of this verse is that God will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear. The goal is that you would be able to endure in living and loving like this. It doesn’t do much good if you only sustain that for a short time but then give up. We need to endure, and God promises we won’t have more than we can take. This principle is true of any testing. God will not give you more than you can bear, so you can endure, whatever the hard thing may be.

Enduring is an important theme in the Bible. Romans 15:4 says, “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” That passage says that Scriptures teach us endurance.

Hebrews was written to some first century Hebrew followers of Jesus who were struggling because they were suffering unrelenting persecution from all sides, and some of them were beginning to cave in under it. In verse 36 the writer told them, “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” The New American Standard translation of that verse is more accurate. It says, “You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what was promised.” Doing the will of God requires endurance.

But let’s think about endurance in our current situation. In a way endurance wouldn’t seem to apply to dealing with the corona epidemic because we don’t have any choice. We can’t make it stop. We can’t fix it. We can’t run away from it. I checked. Yes, you could try to fly to Tahiti but guess what would happen when you get there. You’d face a 14-day quarantine because of the virus.

Our only choice, then, is to just get through this. We have to deal with it and endure. Everybody has to endure, which would seem to say that enduring in this time is nothing special since you don’t have any choice and everybody has to do it. But in the verse we’re looking at endurance is more than just getting through it and surviving. It is not giving in to the temptation to quit trusting God, to give up doing what God wants us to

do. In our situation endurance means more than just gritting our teeth and outlasting this epidemic. It has to do with how we live as we survive it. It means continuing to trust God, living as God wants us to live. It means continuing to have hope in him, continuing to be at peace because we know he loves us and he is in control. It means being patient, waiting on him, persevering in being light in the darkness, being an island of hope in an ocean of fear. It means not living in despair, fear and frustration, but bringing God's grace and love to others in the middle of the crisis.

New Testament scholar William Barclay wrote, "***Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.***" This is the endurance God is calling us to, to turn this thing into glory!

### WHY IS ENDURANCE IMPORTANT?

*Without it, you can't finish the race.*

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul wrote, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." In order to get the prize you have to run all the way to the end of the race. You have to run all the way to the tape at the finish line.

When I was in junior high in Bakersfield I recall a race we had at our school. Looking back I don't know why they chose this distance, but it was a 600 yard race. I went out in a blaze of glory. I was pretty fast and after about 150 yards I was in second place, barely behind the first place guy, and I was pretty sure I could take him when I wanted to give a special burst of speed. But after about 400 yards I began running out of gas. One runner after another passed me. They didn't all pass me. I finished somewhere in the middle of the pack. I found out that in that race, speed mattered, but endurance mattered more. I didn't win because I pooped out. Being the fastest at 100 yards is great, but it doesn't help much if the race is 600 yards long. I had need of endurance.

Unfortunately living by faith *always* requires endurance. In the first 10 verses of 1 Corinthians 10 Paul referred to the example of the ancient Israeli people. After all the travails in Egypt and the miracles that led to their being freed, after crossing the Red Sea bed between walls of water, they went into the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. When they got to Mt. Sinai God told them he would be their God if they would follow his commands. In Exodus 19:8 they said, "We will do everything the Lord has said." Hey, this sounds good to us. Count us in. They were committed to doing whatever God said. Then Moses went up on the mountain to get the details of God's agreement with them. There were a lot of details. He was up there for 6 weeks. Wow, dude went up there more than a month ago, and then went radio silent. We haven't heard a peep from him since. I'll bet he's dead. I don't think he's ever coming back. Don't know what

happened to God. He seems to have gone AWOL. In Exodus 32:1 you see what happened. “When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’”

They were all in for following God. They stuck with it for a whole six weeks. But then they gave up. They had need of endurance. They started worshiping an idol, which is as dumb as it gets. Their story, Paul says, is a cautionary tale for us. We need to be in this thing for the long haul. And the message is that it may get hard. I’ve been under house arrest now for three whole weeks, and I’m tired of it. We’ve been living with the uncertainty of what this epidemic is going to do to our nation for that same amount of time, and we’re anxious. Some are fearful of the disease itself. Now we hear that it’s going to last at least another four weeks. Can we last? We need endurance.

Paul wrote 2 Timothy right at the end of his life. He was in prison yet again, awaiting execution. In 2 Timothy 4:7 he wrote, “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.” In other words, “I have endured. I have run all the way to the end of the race, and now it’s over.” We will not finish the race unless we endure.

*Without endurance, you can’t be mature.*

James 1:4 says, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James says persevering through trials, enduring when it is hard, is the key to being mature and complete.

Through my decades of ministry I have run into many people and ministries with “discipleship” programs. I’ve encountered lots of ideas of what people need to do to grow so that can be mature believers in Jesus. These programs usually involve disciplines of reading the Bible, journaling, praying, giving, sharing our faith and so on.

I think we all should read the Bible, pray, give, and so on. But according to this verse none of those things will make us mature. They have a tendency to make us more full of knowledge, more religious, maybe a little proud of our progress and our discipline, but they won’t make us mature. According to this verse what makes us mature is enduring trials. Persevere when it is hard to keep going. That is how God matures us. You go through tough stuff, you face circumstances that you don’t think you can bear for even another minute, but you keep on trusting God, you hang on to him for dear life. That is how he shapes your soul. That is how he makes you strong. That is how he gives you faith and confidence in him no matter what may come. That is how he changes our hearts and hopes our character. That is how God makes our faith, our confidence in

him, strong to the point that we are complete, mature. And there is no other way to do it! That is God's program.

Well, what if I don't really care about being mature and complete in my faith? Frankly, I'd rather skip all the trials and just go for the chill out option. I know God loves me, so why does it matter if I'm mature? The word translated mature means whole and complete. Remember that John 10:10 says that Jesus came that we might have life to the fullest. Romans 8:6 says, "the mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace." The Spirit there is the Spirit of Jesus. He creates life and peace in us. That's what God is doing in our lives, giving us life. What kind of life does the Spirit produce? Galatians 5:22-23 says it is a life of love, joy, peace.

So God is working in our lives to make us whole, complete as human beings with that life of the Spirit, the life of love, joy, peace and hope. It is to be fully alive with the life that we all want. The only way to become mature, whole, to have that life that we want, is to have endurance. ***Every good thing God wants to pour into our lives comes through endurance. When we quit all we do is short circuit God giving us wholeness of life!***

Psalm 27:14 says "wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Waiting is the problem. It's hard. How are we supposed to do that??

## WHAT CAN HELP US ENDURE?

### **Example**

It is a big help when you are doing something difficult to have someone you admire who has done it. In some ways it's a bit like working out physically. There are some days where I just don't feel like I've got it in me to do it. The temptation to give myself a pass is powerful. But I've been working out with Laurie since we don't have to do social distancing from each other. And when she is committed and moves ahead to work out it makes me think, "If she can do it, then I should do it too."

We have a tremendous example to follow, in fact, the best ever. Hebrews 12:1-3 says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Look at Jesus. He's your example. He endured the cross. I know many of you are thinking, "I am so over this." You're tired of the confinement, of bad news, of concern

over health, over the big concern about the economic fallout that's coming. It's easy to get fearful, impatient, to become short-tempered and frustrated. But our current hardships don't compare with the cross. The cross and what Jesus endured makes our little current episode look like a vacation. Today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts and cheers, all the while knowing that in less than a week the people of that city would be mocking him as he made his painful way to the cross. But he did not waver. If we can keep our eyes on Jesus, focus on how he persevered through that experience without wavering, it will help us remain steadfast in this situation.

### **Mission**

A second element that will be a huge help to us is to have a mission. In John 12:23-24 Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." In other words, he had come to the climax of his life. This was what he had been aiming at all along. He was talking about his death. Then in verse 27 he said, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."

Jesus had a mission. The mission was to save the human race. That could only be accomplished through making the horrendous sacrifice he was facing at that moment. The choice was stark. Give up on the mission and spare yourself the horror, or believe the mission was so crucially important it was worth paying any price to accomplish it, and plunge ahead. Jesus plunged ahead. He endured because he knew his mission.

In Mark 10:45 much earlier Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." He knew that was his mission all along.

For our lives to have meaning they must be dedicated to some great goal, some mission that is bigger than life itself. If we don't have that mission, if we're not accomplishing anything, then our lives literally have no point. If there's no point, then our whole lives become empty, a pitiful waste of resources. Our souls scream in agony at such emptiness and futility.

We need a mission that is worthy of our total devotion, one that is bigger than ourselves. If we do not have that we will not sacrifice for anything, and we simply won't have the strength to endure much of anything. Having a mission like Jesus had, to bring glory to God the Father no matter what it takes, is what will fill our lives with meaning and give us strength to endure.

### **Focus**

Unfortunately there is a plethora of things that distract us from our mission. In 2016 a movie came out that was about the great African American athlete, Jessie Owens. It was called *Race*. It has a scene in which Owens and his track teammates at Ohio State, both black and white, are in the locker room getting dressed after practice. During practice Owens had gotten distracted by some football players who shouted racial slurs at him. Owens' coach, Larry Snyder admonished him, "You can't get distracted, you understand?" Just then the football team came in after finishing their practice. Their head coach said to Snyder, "All right, Larry. Finish this up now. I got boys who need to shower." Snyder says, "Yeah, one second coach. I'm not quite through yet." The football coach is miffed and says, "Larry, you hustle these (he used a racial epithet) out of here now. You hear me?" Snyder completely ignored him. He said to his team, "If you get your head turned by a few gorillas in pads here at home, how are you going to hold up in Michigan?" The football coach and players are offended. They yell at Snyder, "Who are you calling gorillas?" They keep angrily shouting at him, but Snyder totally ignores them and continues talking to his team. They are now showing fear as they warily look at the screaming football players, but Snyder says, "Hey, look at me. A lot of people are going to show up for the Big Ten meet. Not all of them are going to be on our side. You understand? Do you?" The football coach and players start yelling even louder, and the track guys are looking back and forth between them and their coach. Snyder, seemingly oblivious to the clamor goes on, "You gotta learn to block it all out! It's just noise. That's all this is. All it is, is noise. You hear me? They will love you, or they will hate you. Does not matter. Cause either way, when you're out there, you're on your own." He looks directly at Owens and says, "Jesse, do you hear me?" The camera focuses on Owens and after a couple of seconds the clamor in that locker room fades, then goes absolutely silent. The players were still yelling but there was no sound. It represents Owens understanding and tuning out all the noise. He says, "Yeah. Yeah, Coach. I hear you," and a little smile shows up on his face. ***If it's not the mission, it's noise.*** It's all noise. That's all it is. Jesus tuned out all the noise, and that's what we need to do too. Keep our eyes on the mission, keep our eyes on Jesus. All the stuff we see going on, the stuff that unsettles us, causes us fear, is intended to intimidate us. It's noise. We have to tune it out and focus on the mission. If my mission is to do God's will and to bring him glory, then all the fear over what is going to happen to the economy, all the panic over this disease, is noise. It's just noise.

### **Strength**

Isaiah 40:28-29 says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." If you will put your hope in God, wait for him to do work out his good and perfect will, he will give you strength. It doesn't matter how weak or



weary you feel. In fact, this verse suggests that the requirement for getting God's strength is to be weak and weary.

Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." The text literally says "All things I am able to do by the one who empowers me." Who do you suppose the one who empowered him was? That was God. We hear a lot about empowerment these days. According to Paul he got all the empowerment he needed from God. That's a big deal, because I'm pretty sure I will never be called on to face the kinds of ordeals he repeatedly dealt with. God gave him the strength to endure all of it, so he can do the same for me.

## Hope

I've shared this before, but I want to refer to it again because it brings the issue into such clear focus. Tim Keller suggests we consider the case of two women. These two women are the same age, they have the same socioeconomic status, the same education level and similar temperaments. They are as alike as it is possible for two humans to be. Imagine both are given the exact same job on an assembly line in the exact same environment and schedule. The job is to put part A into slot B, then pass it on to the next station. They are to do that job for 8 hours every day. This is exceedingly boring work. There is only one difference between the women. The first woman is told that if she shows up faithfully to her job and does it for the entire year she will get a bonus of \$30,000. The second woman is told that if she also is faithful and sticks it out for the entire year she will receive a bonus of \$30 million. After a few weeks the first woman says, "Don't you hate this job? It's so tedious. Isn't it driving you nuts? I'm thinking of quitting, how about you?" The second woman says, "No, I am thrilled to be in this position. I whistle while I work all day long." What is the difference? It's not their personalities. It's not that the second woman is just more cheerful than the first. The difference is purely about their expectation of the future. What made the second woman able to endure and do it joyfully was *hope*.

There is a powerful connection between hope and endurance. When we lose hope, endurance disappears in a hurry. Dr. Shane Lopez, the world's leading researcher on hope, says hope is not an emotion, it is an essential life tool.

But what hope do we have? What are we to hope in? Do we hope that all of the efforts of the government will be effective and this epidemic will finally end? Do we hope that the stimulus bill will do what it was created to do and it will jump start our wounded economy? I'm sure we all hope that those things will happen, but if they don't are we then left hopeless and despairing?

Years ago the late Malcolm Muggeridge, a famous British journalist, was invited to speak to a prayer breakfast in Washington, DC. As part of his talk he spoke about world affairs at the time and did so from a rather pessimistic perspective. One member of the audience said, “Dr. Muggeridge, you’ve been quite pessimistic. Don’t you see any reason for optimism?” Muggeridge answered, “My friend, I could not be more optimistic than I am, because my hope is in Jesus Christ alone.” He paused for a few moments, then said, “Just think if the early church had pinned its hope on the Roman Empire.”

Our hope is in Jesus Christ alone. That means we have hope not that everything in our current circumstances will turn out the way we want them to, but that in the middle of the situation, however it goes, we are in God’s kingdom, and we will be in his kingdom forever. We have hope that God rules events in this world, and that his purposes will not fail. We have hope that he will somehow work good for us from these events. We have hope that he is with us and will give us the endurance to not just go on, but to overcome with patience, peace, confidence and joy. We have hope of turning this into glory.