

Endure To The End

Enduring to the end of each of life's moments and experiences

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The word "endure" is one of those words that doesn't always make a good first impression. It can come across foreboding and despondent. It's Portuguese counterpart, "perseverar" to persevere, can be easier to get to know because it comes across a little more optimistic. But the reality is, God is quite aware of what mortality will be like for us, which is why He, as our loving Father, he is giving us full disclosure of what we can anticipate by choosing to participate in this mortal existence. He knows that during our time here in mortality, we are going to pass through moments that will be difficult, unpleasant, uncomfortable, and annoying. He knows, better than we do, what this mortal existence can be like, and so when He says, "endure to the end" I think it's almost like Him saying, "hold on tight, this ride is going to get a little bumpy," rather than hiding the truth from us and telling us it's all going to be rainbows and sunshine.

To me, enduring to the end means doing your best to face those difficult moments with your integrity still alive. To endure means to proactively pass through those difficult moments in our lives with faith. To endure means to not just sit by and let those difficult moments have their way with us, but to choose to respond with moral courage.

As Elder Maxwell said: "[endurance] is not only acceptance of the things allotted to us, it is to "act for ourselves" by magnifying what is allotted to us."¹

The thing that always touches me when I'm watching films or documentaries or reading books about devastating times is the courageous people responding with moral courage and integrity. It's touching to me to see people do morally courageous things in the face of so much pressure when it might even seem justifiable to do otherwise.

¹ Neal A. Maxwell, Endure it Well, General Conference April 1990

During World War II, President James E. Faust, then a young enlisted man in the United States Army, applied for officer candidate school. He appeared before a board of inquiry composed of what he described as “hard-bitten career soldier[s].” After a while their questions turned to matters of religion. The final questions were these:

“In times of war should not the moral code be relaxed? Does not the stress of battle justify men in doing things that they would not do when at home under normal situations?”²

There are moments when it can be so easy to justify our behavior because of our circumstances...it can be easy to essentially say “It’s okay that I’m not trying because I’m a victim of my circumstances.” Which more specifically might be like saying, “I would be a much nicer person in this marriage if this person wasn’t such a jerk.” Or “I would be awesome at this calling if it wasn’t for these other people making it so difficult.” Or “I’d love going to Sacrament meetings if they speakers weren’t so dry and boring.”

The reality is, others may be making some moments in our life more difficult, but choosing to “endure to the end” requires more than just closing our eyes and ignoring the reality and treating it like a bad dream that will all go away and all we need to do is hide under our covers until it passes. Choosing to endure is choosing to push ourselves to respond with behavior that is above the typical reaction of the natural man. Enduring is choosing to respond with integrity to uncomfortable realities rather than just waiting for the ride to be over.

Enduring to the end is about the decisions you make in the face of difficulty.

“Therefore, true enduring represents not merely the passage of time, but the passage of the soul...[it]involves much more than putting up with a circumstance.”³ Elder Maxwell

² Todd D. Christofferson, Moral Discipline. General Conference October 2009

³ Neal A. Maxwell. General Conference April 1990

We should not feel ashamed if we are feeling pain and staggering beneath the weight of such moments, for even Christ tremble beneath His moment. Enduring well doesn't mean we won't tremble and feel pain. Enduring is about what we choose to do when we are being crushed by the weight of our circumstances. Enduring to the end is about our heart and our perspective, it's not just about lasting until the clock runs out.

When we look at enduring to the end like a countdown chart, it's like having an advent calendar without any chocolate inside. It leaves us empty and with little fulfillment and satisfaction.

Focusing only on the distant future in an attempt to hide from the current struggles and pretend that they're not real will strain your eyes causing you to develop emotional and spiritual hyperopia, and soon the moments that are right in front of you will blur. You will begin to see your current circumstances distorted rather than seeing things as they really are. This type of vision tends to lead one to wish the present moments to be cut short and to end sooner than is wise according to God's timetable.

"If certain mortal experiences were cut short, it would be like pulling up a flower to see how the roots are doing. Put another way, too many anxious openings of the oven door, and the cake falls instead of rising. Moreover, enforced change usually does not last, while productive enduring can ingrain permanent change."⁴
Elder Maxwell

I had the opportunity to serve a mission, at a bit of a unique time in my life. When I choose to serve a mission I was already done with college and had been teaching for nearly 4 years after graduating. I was 26 years old and was dating Al. Rather than getting married at that time, we both decided to serve a mission.

I loved my mission and missionary work..until I didn't. All the challenges seemed to pile upon me and smother my enthusiasm. I was struggling to speak the language and I had a difficult companion and I felt like I would have been able to do more good at home back where I was actually making a difference than

⁴ Neal A. Maxwell, Endure it Well. General Conference April 1990

staying in the mission field where it was questionable if I was making much of a contribution. Being able only to smiling and nod as my companion taught rather than being able to express my testimony with words felt worthless and I grew more and more discouraged each day.

I was only five or months into my mission and I was already counting down the months until it would all be over. But enduring to the end involved more than just surviving until the last day of my mission so that I could say that I was physically there. Remaining on my mission and waiting for the clock to run out might have still earned me an honorable release, but enduring to the end is more than just waiting for the moment to be over, and surviving each miserable day with the mantra, "This Too Shall Pass." But at that time in my mission, I was so overcome with discouragement and emotional and spiritual pain, that all I felt I could do was just survive another day.

In fact in my mission journal I had describe this moment in my mission with these words: "I feel like I'm hanging on for dear life to a tree branch that I was able to catch miraculously in the middle of a hurricane, and just when I felt like I couldn't hold on anymore, but knew I had to or else I'd be blown away, the branch broke, tossing me into the wind only to be thrown onto the ground. I now lay there somewhere between conscious and unconscious, just coherent enough to feel the flying debris pounding against my limp body."

What happened to me on my mission when I was at my lowest was just as miraculous as any of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. But sometimes the seemingly common occurrences can blind your eyes from seeing God's hand and His omnipotent power.

At times, the ability to endure the end takes a power greater than our own. In my situation, the divine intervention was a chance encounter with my mission president and being able to talk to him in person. This in and of itself was uncommon. In my mission, the missionaries were so spread out that we had little contact with other missionaries and with our mission president. Being transferred to some areas was only possible by airplane or a 12-hour bus ride. We didn't even have phones in our mission. Instead, we would mail or email our mission President a letter once a week to let keep him updated on our progress. We

rarely heard back from him because he didn't have many ways contact us. Even email was unreliable. There would be times that we would go to an internet cafe to read emails from home, only to spend an entire hour waiting for the emails to open due to poor internet connections. While I was on my mission my Grandma and Grandpa Flanders passed away. It took nearly 24 hours from the time that my parents called the mission home until that message was able to reach me because the mission home had to first track someone down in my area who had a phone that they could call to relay the message to. And then that person had to track down my companion and I so that they could relay the message to us. I would see my Mission President when we had mission conferences, but that was pretty much it.

So on this particular day, I was walking out of a chapel after a zone conference and there was my mission president. He pulled me aside and talked with me. My Portuguese at that time was still weak and he didn't speak any English, but that didn't matter because I could feel the love that he had for me. When we finished talking, my circumstances hadn't change, but the burdens that were on my shoulder were eased and I no longer felt it straining my back.

I walked away feeling renewed. But that wasn't all the Lord had in store for me that day. I also happened to receive two letters that day one from my parents and one from Al. They knew of my struggles and my desire to abort my mission. I had told them I was considering coming home so that I could do something with my time where I would be able to make a more valuable contribution. The timing of being able to talk to my mission President, and read a letter from my parents and from Al all in the same day with all of them addressing my concerns and my fears and expressing their love was no coincidence. Receiving a response from three different people on the same day was not simply by chance. That could only be from the same Omniscience God who was able to orchestrate the heavens so that on the very day that Christ was born a new star would appear in the sky.

I don't remember the words from my mission president or from Al or my parents, I don't remember anything they said, but I remember what I felt. Their love had a powerful effect and was able to heal my discouraged heart by infusing it with the love. I began to see through the false views that I had grabbed ahold of and began to see the value of my mission. It was true I didn't have a lot to offer, but it

was also true that if I allowed myself to be an instrument in God's hands, he would offer a lot to others through me.

“When, for the moment, we ourselves are not being stretched on a particular cross, we ought to be at the foot of someone else's—full of empathy and proffering spiritual refreshment.”⁵ Elder Maxwell

Years later I found myself again crippled by another one of life's moments that pushes your soul to the point of breaking. I was facing a very difficult decision and to this day it has been by far the most difficult decision I have had to confront. The impact of my decision would not only affect me but my family and with lasting effects. I did not take this decision and lightly, and it weighed heavily on my heart and mind for many months. I prayed and fasted, I studied it out in my mind, I talked with others, but I felt as if heaven had closed the doors and windows and tossed away the key. I felt like I was receiving no guidance and no answers to my prayers. I would grow discouraged when I'd come across scriptures like, “Ask and ye shall receive”⁶ or “counsel with the Lord and He will direct thee for good,”⁷ and “if any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God.”⁸ I wondered why I wasn't receiving any answers or guidance.

For me at that moment, enduring to the end was a test of my faith, would I still be able to trust that God was indeed listening and orchestrating a way for me to find answers even though at that moment it seemed from my limited perspective that He was giving me the silent treatment?

Was I willing to endure the seemingly unanswered prayers and still have faith in God? Would I still be willing to trust that God was mindful of me even though from my perspective He was ignoring my constant pleading? Would I choose to hold onto my faith while the adversary was screaming at me that God was not there for me and that He has turned His back on me?

⁵ Neal A. Maxwell, Endure It Well. General Conference April 1990

⁶ Matthew 7:7-8

⁷ Alma 37:37

⁸ James 1:5

Enduring to the end is about holding onto your faith when God allows your faith to be tried and pushed beyond the limits of which you have previously experienced. Will you still pray to God when you're not even sure He is listening? Will you still be true to your covenants when it becomes unpopular or inconvenient to do so? Will you act with integrity and moral courage in those moments when it is most difficult to do so?

"As we confront our own trials and tribulations, we too can plead with the Father, just as Jesus did, that we might not shrink — meaning to retreat or to recoil. Not shrinking is much more important than surviving. Moreover, partaking of a bitter cup without becoming bitter is likewise part of the emulation of Jesus"⁹ --Elder Maxwell

He who endured "temptation, and pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death"¹⁰ offers to ease the "burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs."¹¹ He will strengthen us that we can "bear up our burdens with ease, and submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord."¹²

⁹ Neal A. Maxwell, Apply The Atoning Blood of Christ. General Conference October 1997

¹⁰ Mosiah 3:7

¹¹ Mosiah 24:14

¹² Mosiah 24:15

Quotes on Enduring

“The test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well. We pass the test by showing that we remembered Him and the commandments He gave us.” President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “In the Strength of the Lord,” Ensign, May 2004, 17.

In addition, there are also our customized trials such as experiencing illness, aloneness, persecution, betrayal, irony, poverty, false witness, unreciprocated love, et cetera. If endured well now, “all these things” can be for our good and can “greatly enlarge the soul,” including an enlarged capacity for joy (D&C 122:7; D&C 121:42). Meek suffering often does the excavating necessary for that enlarging! Elder Maxwell, October Conference 1997, Apply The Atoning Blood of Christ

“As we confront our own ... trials and tribulations, we too can plead with the Father, just as Jesus did, that we ‘might not ... shrink’—meaning to retreat or to recoil (D&C 19:18). Not shrinking is much more important than surviving! Moreover, partaking of a bitter cup without becoming bitter is likewise part of the emulation of Jesus” (Neal A. Maxwell. Ensign, Nov. 1997, 22).

Patient endurance is to be distinguished from merely being “acted upon.” Endurance is more than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance; it is not only acceptance of the things allotted to us, it is to “act for ourselves” by magnifying what is allotted to us. (See Alma 29:3, 6.)” Elder Maxwell, Endure it Well, April Conference 1990

“Heavenly Father leaves many decisions for our personal choices. Personal decision making is one of the courses of the growth we are meant to experience in mortality....we should study things out in our minds, using the reasoning powers our Creator has placed within us. Then we should pray for guidance and act upon it if we receive it. If we do not receive guidance, we should act upon our best judgment.” Dallin H. Oaks, Ensign/Oct 1994 Our Strengths can become our Downfalls
