

God has called us to a joyful endurance in the midst of life's persistent trials



14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all. 15 See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all. 16 Always rejoice, 17 constantly pray, 18 in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not extinguish the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-19

Joyful Endurance

This life is a marathon, and we live in a broken world. All who live here will suffer loss and have pain. People will fail us, and we will be wronged as well as failing and wronging others. It's not a matter of if but when and to what degree.

I had a couple of volleys of sad news this week from friends who had experienced great loss. This initiated me thinking about how to best navigate the difficult seasons. The Bible promises the birth pains of great global difficulty before Yeshua's return. We've experienced a measure of this the last couple of years, but it most certainly will get much more difficult. So how do we better prepare for coming difficulties and what do we do when we're in an especially grievous season? Here are a smattering (by no means exhaustive) of my current thoughts.

1. Pray: one of my regular prayers is for joyful endurance which includes the following: *"Father, may I not shrink back or give up do to criticism, failure, discouragement, persecution, tribulation or pain. Instead may these things push me into You."* Another prayer that Yeshua gives us from Scripture (and we are wise to proactively pray) is *"Lead us not into tribulation but deliver us from evil."* I believe there are things that happen and are "stored up" for us as we pray these and other preparatory prayers on a regular basis.

2. Stay in Community: I had a conversation with a friend recently where I encouraged him to be regularly connected in a biblical community and cited Hebrew 10:25 where we are not to give up regularly meeting together. I did so with the clear understanding and articulation that things are much messier in some ways in community than they are when we're alone. But, when we come to Yeshua, He calls us out of our darkness and into a spiritual family of fellow-broken brothers and sisters to do life with. That life is messy and painful but redemptive and positive as we over the years continue to connect with God and each other in the midst of our sin and brokenness. I've also found that when I least feel like congregating with other Believers, that is the time I usually need to connect the most.

3. Educate Ourselves: I have noticed that in this season I'm drawn to information related to a) growing in the first commandment and the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle (Matthew 5-7); b) loving my enemies from the heart and exercising radical forgiveness; c) looking at the expected (and redemptive) role of suffering in the life of a Believer; and d) having a greater understanding related to the times surrounding Yeshua's return. Many times the Bible

equates present endurance and holiness to our future hope and confidence in Yeshua's return and the rewards He has for those of us who remain faithful to Him in difficulty.

4. Cultivate God's Presence and Rejoice: In a recent sermon (with the link below), the pastor shared that in times of great grief, technical answers to our questions won't provide the relief we need most but that only God's presence will meet that deep need. God promises to be with us in our suffering (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-10) if we will turn to Him and not away from Him at these times. I'll close with a story from Richard Wurmbrand who repented while in his sparse prison cell that while he had rejoiced at being in that cell that he hadn't yet leapt for joy (Luke 6:23). He got up and worshiped and leaped and danced around his cell. The guard thought he had gone mad and "rewarded him" with more food as the guards had been taught to do for the prisoners who went insane. Wurmbrand laughed and rejoiced in this immediate, temporal reward.

I believe the world will also think us mad as we literally strive to follow Yeshua's words to love, forgive, and bless our enemies; to rejoice in the midst of tribulation and trial; and to draw near to and cultivate a greater love for the One who died to procure our pardon and draw us in to covenant friendship.

I've certainly got a ways to go; what about you? Let's encourage and pray for each other on this long (and at times arduous) journey to the New Jerusalem!