

If You Are Going Through Hell, Keep Going

“If you’re going through hell, keep going.” – Winston Churchill

This quote showed up in my twitter feed last week. It reminds me of two Bible words with which I have a love/hate relationship – **perseverance** and **endurance**. These are two of the most precious, important instructions in the Christian vocabulary. Yet they are some of the hardest as well. My best friend talked with me about these words after her husband left her for another woman.

She had to uproot her life to begin again in a new state. She said that, day after day, her mantra was just to do the next thing. To take one step, then the next step, and then the next step in what felt like a never ending slog through a waist deep river rushing against her. Eventually (after 8 years or so), she slogged through the worst of it.

She didn’t emerge onto completely dry land with no struggles, but she certainly has emerged into a new season of life of much more peace and fewer intense struggles. Most of all, she has seen redemption and healing in key relationships.

Persevere! It’s the best of advice. It’s the hardest of **struggles**. I long at times to curl up in the fetal position in bed. Yet, I have to buck it up and go volunteer in my son’s classroom. I’d rather drink myself to oblivion, but instead I need to make a lesson plan for a math class I’m teaching the next day. Some days, just getting up and taking the next step is the most profound expression of faith we can do.

Romans 5:3-4 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

1 Peter 2:19-20 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what

credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

The **marathon** of whatever **trial** you are facing will certainly one day end. In the meantime, lessons from earthly marathons are helpful. I learned some lessons about endurance while running a ... cough ... 5k. 0k. I know some of you are big runners who put my tiny little 5k to shame. But my two little 5k's put to shame everything I did physically the first 40 years of my life. So there.

I trained and built up from being able to run 10 feet to being able to run 2.5 miles. But no part of those miles when training was easy, and the last mile of the 5k beyond what I had practiced before was mindnumbing. It was just the sound of my shoe hitting the pavement and letting my breath out, over and over again. Don't stop jogging. Keep moving. Don't stop. Keep going. Don't stop. Keep going. I imagine that feeling is greatly intensified for those in 10k's or true marathons.

The thing about our Christian walk is that few of us know if we are in a 5k, a 10k, or a full blown 26 mile marathon. I know I will not be disappointed when I see Jesus face to face for the first time in heaven. Whatever I had to endure on earth, I know I will not have regrets over the long term trials God allowed in my life. But that's the marathon.

That's Dietrich Bonhoeffer praying psalms to himself as he walks naked to his death in a Nazi concentration camp. There was no ultimate physical rescue for him in this first life, though he walked with supreme confidence of his rescue in the next. But for many of my friends, rescue does come, at least in part, in this life.

I have two friends in particular who went through brutal seasons in their marriages who have both emerged from those seasons with resolution and healing – one after a divorce not of her own choosing and one still married and serving God with her husband. Those are the shorter runs – the ones with earthly resolutions. I love to read and hear about believers

who have been rescued in this life – from sin, from sickness, from death, from bankruptcy.

When I am struggling to endure as I wait for redemption in parts of my own life, I seek out stories of redemption in others' families, churches, or ministries. To me, such stories of redemption are like the cups of cold water runners receive from the sidelines in their long distance run.

Most of all, I am able to endure because of the One who endured before me, who endured FOR me.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is the thing that empowers me to keep going – that Jesus kept going for me. He endured the shame of the cross for a joy on the other side, and He's surrounded us as we run along in our own marathon of suffering with a cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us who now stand cheering us on from the sidelines. The picture God gives us in Hebrews 12 of this marathon is beautiful!

The greatest aspect of this inspiring picture is that it moves me from seeing myself slogging alone against a swollen river to seeing myself running together in community, with Christ and with those who have gone on before me. I am cheered on by the community of believers. Those living. Those dead. We rejoice together in the redemption they have already experienced, and we endure together with those still longing for redemption to draw nigh in all aspects of their lives.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*