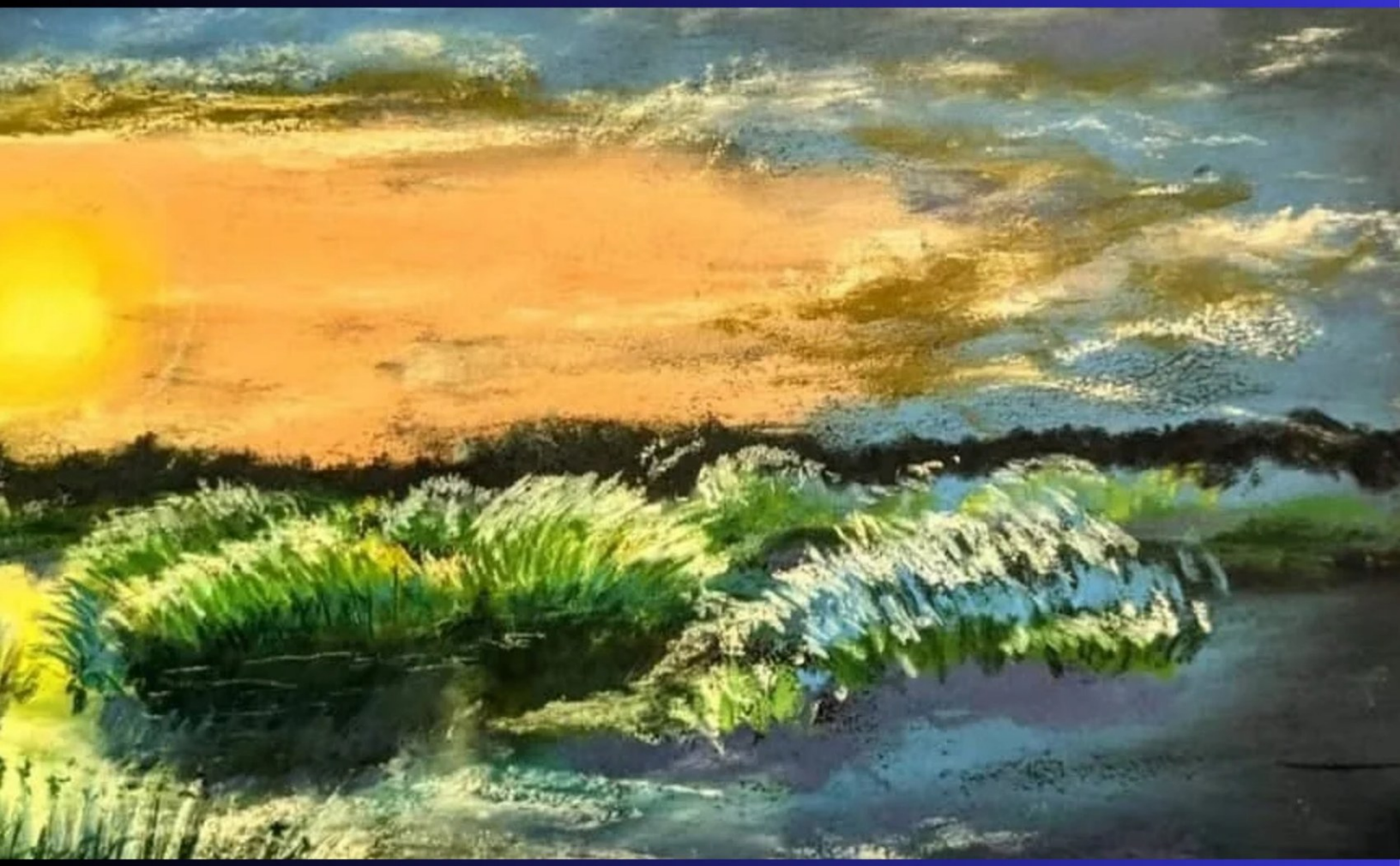
THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

# EVERYDAY ENDURANCE

# WALKING EVERY DAY

## WITH JESUS

A Six-Week Workbook/Guide to becoming a stronger disciple



FULLY REVISED AND EXPANDED 10/26

Faith OVER FACTIONS

faithoverfactions.com

Faith OVER FACTIONS

## For everyone who wanders and feels far from home.

*For the ones who left when the noise got too loud, and the ones still sitting in the back row wondering if they belong.*

*For the solo believer, the doubter, the tired, and the ones who feel alone in a crowded church.*

**You are not lost. You are on your way home.**
**You are not the only one. This is for you.**

## About Faith Over Factions

Faith Over Factions is a place for the spiritually homeless: people who still love Jesus but can't find Him in the noise of institutional religion or partisan faith. Everything here is free. No email address, no paywall, no algorithm deciding what you see.

You'll find reflections, portraits of Christians who resisted when it cost them something, devotionals for unsteady days, and a private Faith Journal for the questions you're not ready to say out loud. We don't take sides in the culture war. We take Jesus at His word and try to follow Him with honesty, humility, and a lot of grace for the stumbling.

**Pull up a chair. You're welcome here.**

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THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

# Everyday Endurance: Walking Every Day with Jesus

*Scripture quotations are from the New Living Translation unless noted.*

## Part One: Ground to Stand On

### 1. For the One Who's Been Told to Hang On

Maybe you heard it from a pulpit, the Sunday after you finally admitted you were tired. Maybe from a small-group leader who meant well. Maybe from the voice in your own head at three in the morning.

*Hang in there. Keep serving. Finish the race. God doesn't use quitters.*

Some of the people who said it were trying to help. Some of them needed the volunteer schedule filled. Either way, the message underneath came out about the same: stay where you are, stop asking questions, and please don't make this harder for the rest of us.

If that's what endurance has meant to you, this guide won't hand you the word again in bigger print.

#### *How the word got bent*

Few virtues have been worked as hard as this one. Said to a burned-out volunteer, endurance means one more year in the nursery. Said to someone in a controlling church, it means submit and wait for things to change. Said about a person who finally walked out the door, it turns into a verdict. *She didn't make it. He fell away.*

For people worn thin by the noise, the word has been put to a different use. It gets sold as bracing for a fight: dig in, hold the line, pick your side and don't blink. Every month brings a new enemy and a new reason to be afraid, and the faithful are told that enduring means staying angry longer than the other side.

The New Testament has something else in mind.

#### *Remaining under*

The Greek word most English Bibles translate as "endurance" is *hupomonē*. Take it apart and it means something close to *remaining under*: *hupo*, under, and *menō*, to remain or stay. It's the picture of a load you keep carrying. The weight is real, and you stay beneath it without being crushed.

*Menō* is also the verb Jesus uses at the Last Supper, in the passage about the vine and the branches. The NLT renders it "remain": "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4).

So the root of the word points toward a person. Endurance in the New Testament is less about staying put than about staying close.

The letter to the Hebrews leans on this word more than once, and it was written to people under real pressure. Earlier in their faith they had been mocked in public and had their property taken (Hebrews 10:32-34). Now some of them were worn out. The writer skips the scolding and tells them what they need: "Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised" (Hebrews 10:36).

Then he tells them where to look. “Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up” (Hebrews 12:3).

The cure he offers for weariness is a long look at Someone who carried more.

### *Outside the camp*

Hebrews has one more word for people who no longer have a seat inside. Near the end of the letter, the writer reminds his readers where Jesus died:

> *So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people holy by means of his own blood. So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. (Hebrews 13:12-13)*

In Israel’s law, outside the camp was where the remains of the sacrifices were burned (Hebrews 13:11), where people with skin disease had to live (Leviticus 13:46), and where executions were carried out (Leviticus 24:14). It was the place for whatever and whoever didn’t belong. The writer’s instruction is simple. Go there, because that’s where He is.

If you’re outside the camp right now, whether you walked out or were shown the door, you are standing where Jesus stood. None of this makes you better than anyone still in the pews. Many of them are carrying loads you can’t see, and some are holding on harder than you know. But you haven’t wandered out of His reach. He went out there first.

### *Everyday*

Most endurance looks like a Tuesday.

It’s the walk to the mailbox when you’d rather stay in bed. A prayer four words long. The decision not to answer the cruel comment. Showing up to your own life for one more day, with Jesus somewhere in it, even if you couldn’t say exactly where.

That’s why this guide is called *Everyday Endurance*. The six people at the center of these chapters, Daniel, Gideon, the Bereans, Job, Barnabas and Paul, each had their dramatic moment: a lions’ den, a night battle, a mob arriving from out of town, a pile of ashes, a bitter falling-out with his closest partner, a Roman chain. What held them up between those moments was ordinary. A window where one man always prayed. Questions asked out loud. A friend who wouldn’t give up on another friend.

### *When unsteady means something more*

Some of what feels like spiritual weariness is more than that. If the low has lasted for weeks, if you can’t sleep or can’t stop sleeping, or if you have thought about not being here, please tell someone. A counselor, a doctor or a pastor you trust can help carry what you can’t. In the United States you can call or text 988 at any hour. Getting help is one of the ways God carries His people. It is not a failure of faith.

And if “endure” has been used to keep you somewhere you are being harmed, hear this plainly. Scripture doesn’t ask you to stay in danger to prove anything. When a plot formed against Paul in Damascus, his friends lowered him over the city wall in a basket at night, and he got out (Acts 9:23-25). Years later he brings it up in a list of things he’s willing to boast about (2 Corinthians 11:30-33).

### *Who this is for*

This is for the tired. For people who still love Jesus but have run through whatever they used to run on. For the ones who left a church, or were pushed, and quietly wonder whether leaving means they failed the test. For the ones still sitting in the back row, holding on with both hands. For anyone who hears the words *unsteady times* and thinks, *yes, that's my week*.

David knew the feeling. He wrote one of his psalms while a trusted friend was turning on him, and near the end he left this for anyone who came after: "Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall" (Psalm 55:22).

He wrote that with the betrayal still fresh.

### *What lies ahead*

The guide moves in four parts.

**Ground to Stand On** starts with what everything else rests on: an anchor that holds when you can't, and strength that shows up in weakness. Daniel prays at the same window for decades. Gideon is found threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress, out of sight of the raiders, and called a mighty hero anyway.

**Under Pressure** takes on two kinds of hard weather. The first is fog, so many voices claiming to speak for God that it's hard to hear Jesus. The Bereans show what to do about it. The second is fire, the trial that doesn't end on schedule. Job argues with God through most of it and still says, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

**The Long Road** is about lasting. Barnabas keeps loving people other believers had written off. Paul, writing what may be his last letter, tired and nearly alone, says he has remained faithful.

**Practice** gathers small habits from across the whole Church, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, for staying close on ordinary days. Some take ten minutes. One takes a single breath.

Along the way, each chapter has a short section on where its theme shows up in daily life now, a simple way to pray that goes a little deeper, and something to draw. Each one ends with three questions. Write your answers down, say them out loud on a walk, or leave them for another day. Nobody is grading this.

If you're reading with a group, turn to For Groups at the back. It lays the guide out as six sessions and gives conversation questions and notes for whoever is leading.

---

#### FOR REFLECTION

1. Who first taught you what endurance means? Looking back, what did they want you to endure, and why?
2. The word for endurance shares a root with Jesus' "Remain in me." What would change for you if endurance meant staying close instead of staying put?
3. Name one ordinary thing you did this week that took more strength than anyone noticed.

CHAPTER 1

# Remaining Under

*The Greek word behind "endurance" runs like a thread through this guide.*

**hupo** *under* + **menō** *to remain, to stay* = **hupomonē** *remaining under*

**John 15:4** CHAPTER 1

*"Remain in me, and I will remain in you."*

The root, *menō*. Endurance starts with staying close to a person.

**Hebrews 10:36** CHAPTER 1

*"Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will."*

**Hebrews 12:1-3** CHAPTERS 1 AND 7

*"And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."*

**Romans 5:3-4** SESSION 4

*"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance."*

**James 1:3** CHAPTER 5

*"For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow."*

**James 5:11** CHAPTER 5

*"For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance."*

**Matthew 24:13** CHAPTER 6

*"But the one who endures to the end will be saved."*

Greek words appear in transliteration. Hebrews 12:2-3 and Matthew 24:13 use the related verb *hupomenō*, "to endure," and James 5:11 uses both forms. See the Notes for Chapter 1.

## 2. Anchored

An anchor has an odd job. The wind keeps blowing, and the water stays rough. The boat still rises and drops all night if the storm wants it to. All the anchor does is keep the boat from drifting onto the rocks while that goes on.

That was the picture the writer of Hebrews reached for when he wanted to describe hope to people who were being thrown around:

> *So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. (Hebrews 6:18-19)*

When a storm nearly swamped the disciples' boat on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was in it, asleep at the back (Mark 4:37-38). The storm still came. So did He.

### *Fled for refuge*

Read the passage again and notice who it's addressed to: "we who have fled to him for refuge."

That's a refugee's phrase. It belongs to someone who left in a hurry and isn't sure what's still standing back home. If you left a church, or a church left you, you know a little of how that feels.

The writer meets those people with encouragement. They can have "great confidence," he says, because what they ran toward is holding.

### *Thrown the wrong way*

Then the image does something strange. Sailors drop an anchor down, into water deep enough to hide it. This one goes up and in, "through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary."

The curtain hung in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, in front of the Most Holy Place. Only the high priest went behind it, once a year (Hebrews 9:7). Hebrews says Jesus has already gone in there for us, ahead of everyone, as our High Priest (Hebrews 6:20).

So your anchor is fastened somewhere you can't see. You can't check on it or haul it up to make sure it's still there. You feel it the way a boat feels its anchor, as a pull against the drift, a line that goes tight when the wind picks up.

That's worth remembering on days when your faith feels like nothing at all. Feelings come and go. The anchor is fastened to Jesus, and He isn't going anywhere.

Christians took to this picture early. Around the year 200, Clement of Alexandria gave believers advice about the signet rings they wore, and his short list of fitting images included a dove, a fish, a ship running before the wind, a lyre and a ship's anchor.

### *Roots, too*

Paul uses a different picture for the same idea:

> *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)*

Anchors and roots have something in common. Both do their work out of sight. Nobody admires a tree's roots on a calm afternoon. You think about them the morning after a windstorm, when the trees with shallow ones are lying across the road.

Paul's word is *continue*. Roots grow slowly, a little at a time. Most of that growing happens on days when nothing seems to be happening at all.

### *False anchors*

Everyone is anchored to something. The question is what it's fastened to.

Success is a common choice, in church and out of it. So are approval, money, comfort and staying busy enough not to feel anything. Some people anchor themselves to being right. For some Christians it's a political movement, on the right or the left, that promises to make the country safe for faith. For others it's a church brand, or a famous pastor with a big platform.

Some of these are good gifts. A paycheck is a mercy, and a friend's approval is a pleasure. They just can't hold the weight of a soul, and when the storm comes they drag along the bottom with you. When a movement loses or a pastor falls, the people anchored there go under.

"He alone is my rock and my salvation," David wrote, "my fortress where I will not be shaken" (Psalm 62:6). The word doing the work in that line is *alone*, and David meant it.

### *Where we feel it today*

Life moves fast. We check our phones without thinking. We take in more headlines before breakfast than anyone can carry, and our minds are running long before our hearts have had a chance to breathe. That pace leaves us restless. It's easy to lose the quiet center where Christ speaks.

Many people live with a low hum of anxiety, the kind that sits under the surface and never fully switches off. Social media adds to the noise. It keeps us comparing. It fills our heads with opinions that feel urgent and rarely feed the soul. Without realizing it, we end up anchored to the wrong things.

So this week, take one small step back toward Christ, the kind you can manage even on a crowded day. Choose a moment each day to put your hand on your chest and whisper:

**"Jesus, I am here."**

Let that small act remind you that you are held, not hurried.

### *Three times a day*

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a young man, after Babylon's armies came to Jerusalem (Daniel 1:1-6). By the time of the lions' den, decades had passed. Babylon itself had fallen to the Medes and Persians, and the book names the new king as Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:30-6:1). If Daniel was a teenager when he was carried off, he was likely past eighty by then.

Officials who resented him persuaded the king to sign a law: for thirty days, anyone who prayed "to anyone, divine or human" except the king would be thrown to the lions (Daniel 6:7). Here is what Daniel did next.

> *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. (Daniel 6:10)*

Look at two small phrases. *As usual. Just as he had always done.*

Most of the courage in that verse is habit. The afternoon the law was signed, Daniel did what he had done thousands of times before, and the habit carried him when the choice got hard.

Then notice the windows. They faced Jerusalem, and by then Jerusalem had been in ruins for close to fifty years. Babylon's army had burned the Temple to the ground (2 Kings 25:8-9). Daniel was praying toward a home that, in any way you could see, was gone. Centuries earlier, at the Temple's dedication, Solomon had asked God to hear His people if they were ever carried off to a foreign land and prayed toward that city (1 Kings 8:46-50). Daniel took him at his word.

If your spiritual home is gone, or changed past recognizing, you're in good company. You can still turn toward God and pray.

David kept a similar rhythm long before Daniel: "Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the LORD hears my voice" (Psalm 55:17). You can borrow it this week with three anchoring moments:

- **Morning.** Read one psalm before you look at the news. Psalm 62 is a good start.
- **Midday.** When your mind drifts, breathe a short prayer: *"Jesus, You are my anchor."*
- **Evening.** Before you sleep, write down one moment from the day when you noticed God's faithfulness.

The story famously ends with an angel and a row of shut mouths (Daniel 6:22). It's worth knowing that Hebrews remembers people who "shut the mouths of lions," and in the next breath remembers others who were tortured, imprisoned and "sawed in half" (Hebrews 11:33-37). Both lists are called faithful. Scripture leaves open which of those stories will be yours. What Hebrews does promise is the anchor.

> ### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: SILENCE
>
> **What it is.** Sitting quietly with Christ without trying to fill the space with words.
>
> **A simple example.** Find a chair. Sit with both feet on the floor and close your eyes. Say, "Lord, I am here," and rest in that stillness for one minute.
>
> **A practice for the week.** Spend one minute in silence after each of your three anchoring moments. Let the quiet draw your roots a little deeper. "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him" (Psalm 62:5).

### VISUAL REFLECTION: AN ANCHOR

Take a pen and paper, or open whatever you like to write in. Draw a simple anchor. It doesn't need to look good. Label one part of it with a word or phrase for where Christ steadies your life. That might be a verse, a daily rhythm, a person who lifts your spirit, or a quiet moment that brings you back to peace.

Come back to the drawing when you feel restless or overwhelmed during the week. Let it remind you that you are held.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. Where in your life do you feel most adrift right now? Name the place, the relationship or the hour of the day.
2. Which false anchor have you been gripping hardest: approval, being right, a movement, a screen, staying busy? What would it cost you to loosen your hold on it a little?
3. Daniel prayed at the same window, at the same times, for years. Choose one place to sit and one time of day for this week, and write them both down.

## 3. Strength in Weakness

Most of us were raised to admire people who can carry a lot. The parent who holds the whole family together and never seems to need anything back. The volunteer who runs three ministries and still remembers your birthday.

Admitting weakness, in that world, feels like failure. It feels like letting people down, or worse, letting yourself down. So we push through. We say we're fine when someone asks. We keep the cracks where nobody can see them, including God, or so we hope.

Paul spent a good part of one letter refusing to play that game.

### *Three times*

Second Corinthians is the letter of a man under attack. People in the church at Corinth had started comparing him, unfavorably, to a set of impressive visiting teachers he calls, with some bite, the "super apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5). The criticism he quotes is blunt: "Paul's letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are worthless!" (2 Corinthians 10:10).

You might expect him to answer with a list of his strengths. Instead, near the end of the letter, he tells them about a thorn.

> *So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)*

Nobody knows what the thorn was. Readers have guessed at an illness, poor eyesight, a speech problem, a persistent enemy. Paul never says, and the guessing has gone on for close to two thousand years.

What he does say is that he asked three times for it to go away. He begged, and the word is his. The answer each time was no, and along with the no came something he hadn't asked for: *My grace is all you need.*

If you have prayed for something to be taken away and it's still there, Paul has stood where you're standing. The thorn kept hurting, and Paul found out that grace could live right next to it. "For when I am weak," he finishes, "then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

### *At the bottom of a winepress*

Gideon is introduced in the middle of a hiding place.

Israel had spent seven years under raiders from Midian, who swept in at harvest and stripped the land (Judges 6:1-6). So when the angel of the LORD found Gideon, he "was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites" (Judges 6:11). Grain was normally threshed out on an open, windy floor, so the breeze could carry off the chaff. A winepress is a pit. You thresh down there when you're scared.

The angel's greeting must have sounded like a joke: "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!" (Judges 6:12).

Gideon's answer is one of the most honest lines in the Old Testament. "Sir," he says, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about?" (Judges 6:13).

The question hangs there unanswered. What Gideon gets is an assignment: "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!" (Judges 6:14).

*The strength you have.* That sentence is for anyone who's waiting to feel ready. Gideon wasn't. He protested that his clan was "the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh," and that he was "the least in my entire family" (Judges 6:15). Then he asked for a sign, and then for another one, and God gave him both (Judges 6:36-40).

### *Too many*

When Gideon finally gathered an army, God's complaint was that it was too big. "You have too many warriors with you," the LORD told him. "If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength" (Judges 7:2).

So God made an offer to the troops: "Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home." Twenty-two thousand of them took it (Judges 7:3). Nobody shamed them for going. Then the 10,000 who were left went down to the water, and only 300 stayed (Judges 7:5-7).

Look at what God does next. On the night of the attack, He tells Gideon, "But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah" (Judges 7:10). God plans around Gideon's fear, with no lecture attached, and sends him to the edge of the enemy camp to overhear something that will encourage him (Judges 7:11).

The weapons that night were rams' horns, torches and clay jars, with a torch hidden inside each jar (Judges 7:16). Just after midnight, the 300 "blew the rams' horns and broke their clay jars," and the light poured out (Judges 7:19-20).

It's hard to read that next to something Paul wrote in the same letter as the thorn: "We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure" (2 Corinthians 4:7). In Gideon's story, the light showed when the jars broke.

Scripture is honest about Gideon to the end. Years later he made a golden ephod that his people turned into an idol, "and it became a trap for Gideon and his family" (Judges 8:27). God used a frightened man in a winepress, and he stayed a man. That honesty is a mercy for the rest of us.

### *Soar, run, walk*

The prophet in Isaiah 40 was speaking to people who felt forgotten by God (Isaiah 40:27), and he gave them one of Scripture's best-loved promises:

> *He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:29-31)*

Read the last three lines again and notice the order. Soar, then run, then walk.

Most lists build toward the big finish, but Isaiah's winds down and lands on walking. Some seasons, the gift is wings. More often it's the ordinary, unglamorous strength to put one foot in front of the other and not faint on the way to the car.

That counts. Most of the life of faith is walking.

The verse people quote the most on this subject needs its context, too. "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13) gets printed on gym shirts and team banners. Paul wrote it from custody, about hunger. Two lines earlier he says he has learned to live "with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little" (Philippians 4:12). The everything he could do through Christ included going without.

### *Where we feel it today*

We live surrounded by highlight reels. Everyone else's life looks handled. Ask how someone is doing and the answer is "busy," said almost like a brag. Plenty of churches run on the same fuel: the same tired dozen people holding up every program, with burnout treated as the price of being faithful.

When Elijah hit bottom, he sat down under a broom tree in the wilderness and said, "I have had enough, LORD" (1 Kings 19:4). God's first response was food and sleep. An angel woke him, gave him bread and water, and let him sleep, and then did it all again (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is eat something and lie down. If the tiredness has lasted for months, see a doctor as well. Your body is part of how God made you, and Elijah's recovery started with his.

This week, try one small act of honesty. Tell one safe person about one place where you're not strong right now, and when you pray, say the same thing to God in four words:

**"Lord, I can't. You can."**

#### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: A BREATH PRAYER

**What it is.** A short prayer said in rhythm with your breathing. One of the oldest is the Jesus Prayer, prayed by Orthodox Christians for centuries: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Its words echo the blind man at Jericho, who kept shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38).

**A simple example.** Breathe in slowly and pray, *"Lord Jesus Christ."* Breathe out and pray, *"have mercy on me."* Or use your own: in, *"Lord, I can't."* Out, *"You can."*

**A practice for the week.** At midday, or whenever you feel the tiredness land, take three slow breaths with Isaiah 40:31. In: *"Those who trust in the LORD."* Out: *"will find new strength."* At night, write down one moment when strength showed up that wasn't yours.

#### VISUAL REFLECTION: A CLAY JAR

Draw a simple jar. Give it a crack or two, because real jars have them. Along one crack, write a word for a weakness you're carrying right now. Then draw a small flame inside the jar, and beside it write one way God has met you there, even if it was small.

Keep the drawing where you'll see it. The crack is allowed. In Gideon's story, the light came through the broken places.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. Where do you feel least equipped right now? Name one situation, not a general feeling.
2. Gideon asked God, "Why has all this happened to us?" and was still called a mighty hero. What honest question would you ask God if you were sure He'd let you?
3. Think of one person safe enough to hear "I'm not okay with this one." Write down their name and when you'll tell them.

# Part Two: Under Pressure

## 4. Seeing Through the Fog

Some of the people who misled you were never strangers.

Maybe it was a pastor you trusted for years, until the story came out. Maybe a ministry whose books sat on your shelf, or a teacher who could quote whole chapters from memory and still treated people like furniture. Maybe it was a whole movement that told you God was on its side, and kept saying so after the fruit had gone bad.

If that's your history, the word *discernment* may sting. Some of you heard it as a weapon, from people who hunted heresy in everyone but themselves. Others learned it too late, after the damage was done. Either way, it's worth taking the word back. Jesus gave it to His followers for their protection, and He meant it for people exactly like you.

### *Dressed as sheep*

Jesus' warning comes near the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

> *Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16)*

The disguise is the point. A wolf that looked like a wolf would be easy. This one looks harmless. It sounds familiar. It knows the songs and uses the right words, and it stands inside the flock.

Years later, Paul said the same thing to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, who had come to meet him at the port of Miletus before he sailed for Jerusalem. "I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following" (Acts 20:29-30).

*From your own group. To draw a following.* Two thousand years before anyone had a platform, Paul could describe the business model.

Jesus warned about deception again later, on the Mount of Olives, when His disciples asked about the end of the age. "Don't let anyone mislead you," He told them, "for many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). Notice what He asks of them. There's no chart and no list of names to fear. For the rest of the chapter, He tells them to keep watch and stay faithful (Matthew 24:42-46).

### *The way they act*

The NLT adds a helpful gloss to Jesus' word *fruit*: "that is, by the way they act." How polished the speaker is, and how many people come to listen, don't enter into it.

Jesus pushes that point hard a few verses later, and it's one of the most startling things He ever said:

> *On judgment day many will say to me, "Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name." But I will reply, "I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws." (Matthew 7:22-23)*

Prophecy, deliverance, miracles. By most church measures, that's a successful ministry. Jesus says He never knew them.

Results, crowds and growth charts can all be faked, or bought, or produced by sheer force of personality. Fruit is harder to fake because it takes time to grow. Paul names the real crop: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Just before that, he lists the other kind, including "hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division" (Galatians 5:20).

You don't need a seminary degree to tell those two lists apart. You need to watch for a while. And you need to be willing to watch the people you like, on your side of whatever divide, as closely as the ones you don't.

### *Eager and careful*

Paul and Silas left Thessalonica in a hurry, at night, and went to a town called Berea. Luke records what happened next:

> *And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. (Acts 17:11)*

Look at the two halves of that verse. The Bereans were open-minded and listened eagerly, and then they went home and checked what they'd heard against the Scriptures, day after day.

Most of us lean one way or the other. Some people believe whatever comes from a confident voice. Proverbs has a word for them: "Only simpletons believe everything they're told!" (Proverbs 14:15). Others have been burned so badly they can't hear anything without bracing for the lie. The Bereans did both things Proverbs asks for. They stayed open, and they "carefully" considered their steps.

And notice whose teaching they checked. It was Paul's, and Luke praises them for it. Checking a teacher against Scripture is no insult to the teacher. That includes this guide. Every verse in it is marked so you can look it up.

The story has a sour ending. People from Thessalonica heard Paul was in Berea, "went there and stirred up trouble" (Acts 17:13), and Paul had to leave again. The people who search the Scriptures don't always win the room, but they're the ones Luke holds up as the example.

### *Ask*

Discernment can feel like a skill for experts. James puts it in reach of anyone:

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking" (James 1:5).

Read the second sentence slowly if your questions were ever treated as a problem. *He will not rebuke you for asking.* Plenty of people have been shamed in a church for asking the wrong thing out loud. God isn't one of them. The asking is welcome, and so is the honest "I don't know" that comes before it.

John adds a plain instruction: "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit" (1 John 4:1). He tells his readers to test what they hear. He wrote that to a church, about people who claimed to speak for God.

### *His voice*

Jesus gave His followers one more way to see through fog, and it's the simplest. Describing Himself as a shepherd, He said the sheep "follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice" (John 10:4-5).

Sheep learn one voice so well that every other voice sounds wrong.

That's why the best defense against deception is time spent with Jesus in the Gospels. Read what He actually said, how He treated people at the edges, whom He was gentle with and whom He confronted. Then, when a message comes at you dressed in His name, you can ask one question: *Does this sound like Jesus?*

### *Where we feel it today*

The fog has never been thicker. Feeds are built to keep us scrolling, and nothing keeps us scrolling like anger and fear. Clips get cut down until they say the opposite of what the speaker meant. Photos and videos can be faked in minutes now. And every side has its own prophets, each one sure God agrees with them, each one with a new enemy to warn you about.

None of this is new to God, but the speed is new to us.

So this week, slow down your sharing. Before you repost, forward or repeat anything that makes you angry or afraid, wait a day. Then ask the question:

**"Does this sound like Jesus?"**

#### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: THE EXAMEN

**What it is.** A short evening prayer for reviewing the day with God. It comes from Ignatius of Loyola, who also wrote guidelines for what he called the discernment of spirits: learning to notice what draws you toward God and what pulls you away.

**A simple example.** Tonight, sit quietly and ask God for light. Then ask two questions about the day. *When did I feel drawn toward love, peace and Jesus? When did I feel pulled toward fear, contempt or hurry, and what was I listening to then?*

**A practice for the week.** Each morning, read a few verses from one of the Gospels and ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). Each evening, spend ten minutes with the two questions. Write down one way God's Word corrected or clarified your thinking that day.

#### VISUAL REFLECTION: A FRUIT TREE

Draw a simple tree with three or four branches. On each branch, write the name of a voice you listen to often: a pastor, a podcast, a news channel, a friend, a feed. Then, at the end of each branch, draw the fruit you've noticed in yourself after listening. Peace or agitation? Love or contempt? Clearer or more confused?

The point is to notice, with no shame attached. Jesus said you can identify a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:20), and that includes the trees you've been eating from.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. Which voices get the most of your attention in an ordinary week? Write down the top three by name.
2. James says God "will not rebuke you for asking." When was a question of yours treated as a problem, and what would you ask God about it now?
3. Choose one place this week where you'll practice asking "Does this sound like Jesus?" before you speak or share: a group chat, a feed, a dinner table.

## 5. Faith in the Fire

Maybe someone handed you the verse in a hospital hallway. Maybe it came in a card after the layoff, or from a friend who meant well and changed the subject right after.

*Count it all joy.*

Said at the wrong moment, it can feel like being told your pain is a failure of attitude. It isn't. And James, who wrote the line, would probably be the first to say so.

### *Consider*

Here is the passage in full:

> *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

Look at the verb. James says *consider* it. That's a thinking word, the kind you'd use for weighing an account. He isn't telling anyone how the trouble should feel. He's telling them what it can lead to: endurance, our old word *hupomonē* from Chapter 1, the strength to remain under a load.

And look at the next line. "So let it grow." Growing takes time. Nobody plants a seed and digs it up on Thursday to see how it's doing.

Later in the same letter, James gives his readers an example of endurance, and the name he chooses is surprising.

"We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy" (James 5:11).

Job. The man who spent most of a long book arguing with God.

### *Ashes*

The story opens with loss stacked on loss. Raiders steal Job's herds, fire destroys his flocks, his servants are killed, and then a windstorm collapses a house on all ten of his children (Job 1:13-19). His first response is famous: "The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21).

Then his health goes. He ends up sitting among the ashes, scraping his sores "with a piece of broken pottery" (Job 2:8). His wife has lost the same ten children. "Curse God and die," she tells him (Job 2:9).

Three friends come to comfort him, and for a week they do the best thing they will do in the whole book. "Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words" (Job 2:13).

When Job finally speaks, it's to curse the day he was born (Job 3:1).

It's worth holding those two speeches side by side. Within days of each other, the same man said "Praise the name of the LORD" and wished he had never existed. Scripture keeps both. If you've prayed a faithful prayer in the morning and a furious one by night, you're in the book.

### *East and west*

For the next thirty-some chapters, Job's friends defend God and Job argues with Him. One of the most honest passages comes in the middle:

> *I go east, but he is not there. I go west, but I cannot find him. I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden. I look to the south, but he is concealed. But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold. (Job 23:8-10)*

Job can't find God anywhere. Every direction comes up empty. And then: *But he knows where I am going.*

That may be what endurance looks like from the inside, on the worst days. You can't find God. You trust that God can find you.

A few chapters earlier, Job does something stranger still. He wishes his complaint could be made permanent, "carved with an iron chisel and filled with lead, engraved forever in the rock" (Job 19:24). In the very next breath he says, "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last" (Job 19:25).

Carve my protest in stone. My Redeemer lives. Both in one breath, from the same man, sitting in the same ashes.

### *What the book never explains*

When God finally speaks, out of a whirlwind, He asks Job about the stars, the sea, the wild animals and the edges of the world (Job 38-41). He says nothing about the scene in heaven the reader saw in chapters 1 and 2. Job never gets his explanation.

Then God turns to the friends who defended Him so carefully and says, "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7). The man who argued is the one God says got it right.

The book ends with restoration. "The LORD gave him twice as much as before!" (Job 42:10). He also has "seven more sons and three more daughters" (Job 42:13). New children don't replace the ones who died, and the book makes no claim that they do. Some of what Job lost stayed lost.

That's the honesty James was pointing to when he called Job a man of great endurance. Endurance, in Job's case, was faith stretched out over time, sometimes shouting, sometimes silent, refusing to let go of the One who hadn't let go of him.

### *The fourth man*

The book of Daniel has its own fire, and a literal one. Three Jewish exiles, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refuse to bow to a gold statue, and the king threatens to throw them into a furnace. Their answer has given courage to believers for centuries:

> *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up. (Daniel 3:17-18)*

*Even if he doesn't.* Their faith doesn't depend on the outcome. They're thrown in, and the king looks into the flames and shouts, "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed!" (Daniel 3:25).

The fire was still hot. They had company in it.

Isaiah heard the same promise centuries before: "When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you" (Isaiah 43:2).

Isaiah says *when* three times, and each time the promise is company.

Peter wrote about fire too, to believers he called people "living as foreigners" scattered across the Roman provinces (1 Peter 1:1). He told them their trials would last "for a little while," and that their faith was "being tested as fire tests and purifies gold" (1 Peter 1:6-7). From inside a trial, a little while can feel like years. It may be years. Peter leaves the length alone and tells them what the fire is doing.

Sometimes endurance looks like soaring on wings like eagles. Other times it looks like crawling on your hands and knees, whispering, *Lord, carry me.* Both count.

### *Where we feel it today*

Some trials don't end on schedule. The diagnosis that becomes a way of life. Year three of caring for a parent who no longer knows your name. Month eight of the job search. A child who stopped calling.

Churches aren't always good at the long ones. Testimonies tend to wrap up in five minutes, with a healing or a new job at the end. Some preachers imply that enough faith would fix it. Meanwhile the people whose trials keep going drift quietly toward the back row, and then out the door, because nobody asks anymore.

If your trial has turned into something heavier, if the grief won't lift or the darkness has settled in, a grief counselor, a support group or a doctor can help carry it. That's one of the ways God keeps His promise to be with you in the water.

This week, think of one person in a long trial. Ask how it's going today, and then listen without trying to fix anything. Sit on the ground with them for a while, the way Job's friends did before they started talking.

#### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: THE EVEN-IF PRAYER

**What it is.** A prayer of trust that doesn't wait on the outcome. It takes its shape from three men standing in front of a furnace: "But even if he doesn't" (Daniel 3:18).

**A simple example.** Finish this sentence honestly and pray it out loud: *"Even if ___, I will trust You, Lord."* If you can't say the second half yet, pray the first half and stop there. God hears that too.

**A practice for the week.** Each morning, write your Even-If sentence. When hardship presses in at midday, pray Isaiah 43:2 in your own words: *"You are with me in the waters and the flames."* Each evening, write down one way this trial might be shaping your endurance, even if the refining feels hidden.

### VISUAL REFLECTION: A REFINER'S FIRE

Draw a small bowl sitting over a flame, the kind a goldsmith would use. In the flame, write the name of the trial you're in. Inside the bowl, write one thing you hope will remain when the fire has done its work: a steadier faith, a softer heart, an honesty you didn't have before.

If nothing comes to mind, leave the bowl empty for now. Come back to it in a week.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. What trial are you in that hasn't ended on schedule? Name it plainly, along with how long it has lasted.
2. Job argued with God, and God said Job had spoken accurately. What argument with God have you been afraid to say out loud?
3. Write one Even-If sentence, then decide when you'll pray it this week: with your morning coffee, on the drive to work, or before bed.

# Part Three: The Long Road

## 6. Love in a Cold World

Coldness rarely arrives all at once. It comes in like frost, a thin layer at a time.

A sharp word here. A betrayal there. A pastor who didn't call when your father died. A relative who stopped speaking to you over an election. A thousand small irritations, and then one big one. Over time you start guarding yourself. It seems safer not to care, easier not to try, less painful not to love.

Nobody decides to go cold. It happens while you're protecting yourself, and by the time you notice, it's hard to remember what warm felt like.

### *The love of many*

Jesus saw this coming. On the Mount of Olives, in the same conversation where He warned about deception, He said:

> *And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:10-13)*

Look at whose love grows cold. In the verses just before, the "many" are people who once followed Jesus and now "betray and hate each other." The cold He's warning about starts inside the family.

Then comes the word we've been following since Chapter 1. "The one who endures to the end." In this passage, enduring has a specific shape. It means staying warm when everything around you is pulling toward cold.

The letter we call 1 John, traditionally from the apostle in his old age, went to churches that had just been through a split (1 John 2:19). It puts the answer simply: "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Notice the word *continue*. Love, for John, gets chosen again in the morning, and again after the next sharp word. And when you've run out, Paul says where the supply comes from: God "has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:5). You aren't expected to produce it from scratch.

### *Son of Encouragement*

Barnabas first appears in Acts with a nickname. His real name was Joseph, a Levite from the island of Cyprus, but "the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means 'Son of Encouragement')" (Acts 4:36). The first thing we see him do is sell a field and give the money away (Acts 4:37).

The next time he shows up, he's standing between a frightened church and its former persecutor.

Saul of Tarsus had hunted Christians. After his conversion he came to Jerusalem and "tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer!" (Acts 9:26). You can't blame them. He'd been dragging believers out of their homes (Acts 8:3).

"Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles" (Acts 9:27). He vouched for the man nobody trusted. He told them Saul's story and stood next to him while they decided.

Later, when the church in Antioch began to grow, Jerusalem sent Barnabas to see what was happening. Luke says he was glad at what he found and encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord, and he calls Barnabas a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, brought him back, and the two of them taught there together for a whole year (Acts 11:22-26). Humanly speaking, Paul's years in Antioch, and the missionary journeys that were launched from there (Acts 13:1-3), began because Barnabas went looking for him.

### *A second chance*

Years later, the two friends split.

On their first missionary journey, a man named John Mark had gone with them and then left partway through. When it was time for a second journey, Barnabas wanted to give him another chance. "But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated" (Acts 15:38-39).

Scripture doesn't tidy this up. Two good men, both full of the Spirit, couldn't agree, and they went separate ways. Sometimes love parts ways without poisoning the well.

But watch what happened to Mark. Barnabas, his cousin (Colossians 4:10), took him to Cyprus. Acts never mentions Barnabas again. But near the end of Paul's life, writing from prison, Paul asked for him by name: "Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

The man Paul once refused became the one he wanted beside him. Barnabas's stubborn encouragement outlasted the argument.

### *A basin and a towel*

Love in the way of Jesus is tougher than a feeling. On the night before He died, knowing that "the devil had already prompted Judas" to betray Him (John 13:2), Jesus "wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13:4-5).

John's account puts Judas at that table. Jesus washed his feet too.

Then He gave them the commandment that would mark them: "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:34-35).

Jesus also asked for something harder: "But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" (Matthew 5:44). That command has always been costly. It costs something different in a culture where contempt for the other side has become a kind of loyalty test. Loving your enemies now includes the ones on the other side of every divide you care about, and the ones on your own side who have gone cold.

One honest word here. Loving someone doesn't mean letting them keep hurting you. Paul said, "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18), and the phrase *all that you can* admits there are limits. You can pray for someone and still keep a safe distance. Some love has to be practiced from across the room.

Many people find that choosing love, even in small ways, starts to thaw their own hearts.

### *Where we feel it today*

Outrage spreads faster than kindness. Feeds reward the sharpest comment, the cruelest clip, the most contempt for whoever is on the other side. Families stop talking over elections. Church people who once shared casseroles now trade insults online. And the steady stream of bad news can leave you numb, too tired to feel much of anything for anyone.

That numbness is part of what Jesus warned about. It's how the love of many grows cold.

This week, look for one person who is overlooked or discouraged, and encourage them in some small way. A text. A note. Five minutes of real attention. Barnabas made a life out of moments like that.

#### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: PRAYING FOR THE HARD-TO-LOVE

**What it is.** Praying by name for someone you find hard to love, the way Jesus told His followers to pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44). You don't have to feel warm first. The praying often comes before the warmth.

**A simple example.** Choose one name. Pray, *"Lord, bless ___ today. Give them what they need. And soften me where I've gone hard."* If you can't manage the first sentence yet, start with the last one.

**A practice for the week.** Each morning, read Colossians 3:12-14 and ask God to clothe you with "tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Each evening, pray by name for your hard-to-love person, then write down one way that showing love, even in a small way, softened your own heart.

#### VISUAL REFLECTION: A BASIN AND A TOWEL

Draw a simple basin with a towel draped over its edge. On the towel, write the name of one person you could serve this week in a small way that nobody else will notice. Next to the basin, write the name of someone who once did that for you.

Keep the drawing where you'll see it. Let it remind you that the warmest love often looks like an ordinary chore.

#### FOR REFLECTION

1. Where has coldness crept into your heart without your noticing? Name one relationship or one group of people.
2. Barnabas stood beside Saul when nobody else trusted him. Who stood beside you like that, and who might need you to do it for them?
3. Write down the name of one person who is hard for you to love. Decide on one day this week when you'll pray for them by name.

## 7. Finishing Strong

Most of us have a shelf of unfinished things. A Bible reading plan that stalled somewhere in Leviticus. A gym membership. A journal with eleven entries and two hundred blank pages.

Some unfinished things hurt more. Maybe you served in a church for twelve years and then couldn't make yourself walk back through the door. Maybe someone told you that leaving meant you'd "quit the race," and part of you believed them.

If so, it's worth looking closely at the race Scripture actually describes, and at who sets it.

### *The race set before us*

> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Three phrases are worth slowing down for.

*The race God has set before us.* God sets the course. No institution owns it, and no program defines it. The race is yours, laid out by Him, and it may not run through the building it used to.

*Every weight that slows us down, especially the sin.* The writer lists weights and sin separately. Some of what slows you down isn't wrong at all. It's just heavy. Old shame. Someone else's expectations. The habit of being everyone's unpaid staff. Those can be set down too.

*With endurance.* Here is *hupomonē* one last time, the remaining under we met in Chapter 1. And the writer tells us how it's done: by keeping our eyes on Jesus, "the champion who initiates and perfects our faith." Older translations call Him "the author and finisher." Either way, He started this, and He's the one who finishes it.

Paul said the same to the Philippians: "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6). The finishing is God's work. Your part is to keep showing up for it.

### *A crowd of witnesses*

The "huge crowd of witnesses" is the list in the chapter just before, Hebrews 11: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab and many more. It's easy to imagine them as a stadium full of winners.

Read the chapter again. "All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth" (Hebrews 11:13). The chapter ends the same way: "none of them received all that God had promised" (Hebrews 11:39).

The people cheering you on are foreigners and nomads, people who finished faithfully without seeing the end. If you feel like a spiritual nomad yourself, that crowd is yours.

### *The coat and the books*

Second Timothy is traditionally the last letter Paul wrote, from a Roman prison, near the end of his life. It contains the lines people quote at funerals:

> *As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. (2 Timothy 4:6-7)*

Keep reading, though, and the letter turns plain and human. "Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life" (2 Timothy 4:10). "Only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). "When you come, be sure to bring the coat I left with Carpus at Troas. Also bring my books, and especially my papers" (2 Timothy 4:13).

He's cold. He wants his coat. He wants something to read.

Then this: "The first time I was brought before the judge, no one came with me. Everyone abandoned me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength" (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

That's what finishing strong looked like for the apostle Paul. A cold cell, a few friends gone, one still there, a request for a coat, and a prayer that the people who didn't show up would be forgiven. Hardly anyone would have called it a triumphant finish at the time.

He also asked for Mark (2 Timothy 4:11), the man he once refused to travel with. Somewhere along the long road, that argument got settled.

### *I press on*

Paul never claimed he'd arrived. Writing to the Philippians, he said:

> *No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

Paul had plenty to forget. He'd persecuted the church (Philippians 3:6). He never hid that past. He names it in the same letter. Forgetting, for Paul, meant refusing to let it set the pace.

The prize waiting at the end is described in one of Jesus' parables. When the faithful servant gives his account, the master says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount" (Matthew 25:21).

The words are *faithful* and *small*. Impressive and flawless never come up. The measure of endurance is faithfulness over time, in amounts that often look small.

Some stretches of this race will feel like soaring. Others will feel like barely shuffling forward, gasping for breath and whispering for strength. Both are part of the road. To keep showing up, to keep leaning on God's strength, to keep your eyes on Jesus: that is finishing strong.

### *Where we feel it today*

We live in a culture of starting over. New year, new plan, new program, new church, new everything. Starting feels good. The long middle is where most of us drift.

Pastor and writer Eugene Peterson borrowed a phrase for the title of a book on the Psalms of Ascent: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That's a good description of what Scripture calls endurance. It's rarely dramatic. Mostly it's faithful repetition, in the same direction, for a long time.

This week, finish one small thing you've left undone. A letter, a repair, a chapter. Let it remind you that finishing is possible, one plain step at a time.

### A DEEPER WAY TO PRAY: A RULE OF ENDURANCE

**What it is.** A short set of rhythms you choose on purpose, to help you keep going when motivation runs out. Benedictine monks have lived by a rule for nearly fifteen hundred years, and Benedict himself called his a little rule for beginners.

**A simple example.** Choose one thing to do daily (a breath prayer in the morning), one thing to do weekly (an hour of rest, or a walk with a friend), and one person to walk with (someone you'll check in with once a month).

**A practice for the week.** Each morning, pray a short breath prayer: *"Eyes on Jesus."* When distractions pull at you during the day, repeat a few words from Philippians 3:14: *"I press on to reach the end of the race."* Each evening, write down one way you stayed faithful today. By the end of the week, write out your own Rule of Endurance, something simple enough to carry beyond these pages.

### VISUAL REFLECTION: A CAIRN OF STONES

After a victory, the prophet Samuel set up a large stone and named it Ebenezer, "the stone of help," saying, "Up to this point the LORD has helped us!" (1 Samuel 7:12).

Draw a small stack of stones, the kind hikers leave to mark a trail. On each stone, write a word for one time God helped you get this far. Add a stone whenever you remember another one.

### FOR REFLECTION

1. What weight, not necessarily a sin, is slowing you down right now? Name it plainly.
2. Paul finished with a cold cell, a few loyal friends and a prayer for the ones who left. What would finishing this season faithfully look like for you, in plain terms?
3. Write your Rule of Endurance: one daily practice, one weekly practice, and the name of one person to walk with. Put it somewhere you'll see it every day.

# Part Four: Practice

## 8. Practices From the Whole Church

Christians have been practicing endurance for two thousand years, and different branches of the family learned different habits along the way. None of them owns staying close to Jesus. All of them have something to teach.

The practices below come from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant believers, and from the Scriptures they share. You've already met each of them in a chapter. Here they're gathered in one place, with a little more about where they come from and how to begin.

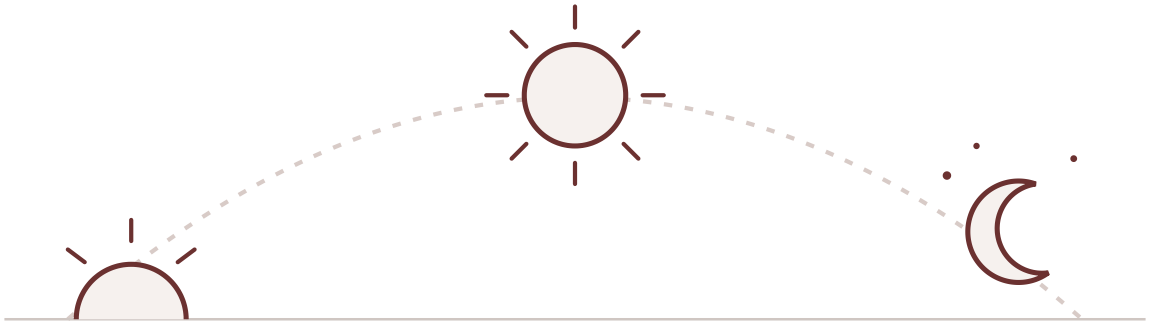
Treat this as a pantry, not a program. Don't try them all. Choose one and try it for two weeks. If it doesn't fit, set it down and try another.

| Practice | Rooted in | Time | Good for |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fixed-Hour Prayer | Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17; the daily office kept by Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican communities | 2-5 min, three times a day | Restlessness, drifting |
| Silence | The Desert Fathers and Mothers; Psalm 62:5 | 1-10 min | Noise, anxiety |
| The Jesus Prayer | Orthodox; Luke 18:13, 38 | Seconds, any time | Weakness, panic, weariness |
| The Examen | Catholic (Ignatius of Loyola) | 10-15 min, evening | Confusion, discernment |
| The Even-If Prayer | Daniel 3:17-18; Habakkuk 3:17-18 | 2 min, morning | Long trials |
| Praying for the Hard-to-Love | Matthew 5:44 | 5 min, evening | Bitterness, coldness |
| A Rule of Endurance | Benedictine (the Rule of Saint Benedict) | One evening to write, a few minutes a month to review | Keeping going |

### *Fixed-Hour Prayer*

Daniel prayed three times a day, "just as he had always done" (Daniel 6:10). David prayed "morning, noon, and night" (Psalm 55:17). The early church kept set hours too. Acts mentions Peter and John going to the Temple for the afternoon prayer service (Acts 3:1), and over the centuries monasteries and churches built whole days around fixed times of prayer, sometimes seven of them, after Psalm 119:164: "I will praise you seven times a day."

You don't need seven. Start with three.



| Morning | Midday | Evening |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Read one psalm before you check your phone. | Stop for one minute and pray, "Jesus, You are my anchor." | Write down one place you noticed God's faithfulness today. |
| *With the first cup of coffee* | *Before lunch* | *Before you turn out the light* |

Add a minute of silence after any of the three, as Chapter 2 suggests.

Tie each one to something you already do: the first cup of coffee, lunch, brushing your teeth. Habit is what carried Daniel on the day it mattered.

### *Silence*

In the fourth century, men and women went out into the deserts of Egypt to pray, and Christians still read the short sayings they left behind. One brother asked Abba Moses for a word of advice. The old monk told him, "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."

Your cell can be a chair by a window, or the car in a parking lot. Sit with both feet on the floor and close your eyes. Say, "Lord, I am here," and then stop talking. Start with one minute. When your mind wanders, and it will, come back to the same four words.

Nothing needs to happen. "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him" (Psalm 62:5).

### *The Jesus Prayer*

Orthodox Christians have prayed this for centuries, and its words echo two people in Luke who cried out to Jesus: the tax collector who prayed, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner" (Luke 18:13), and the blind man at Jericho who shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38).

The usual form is *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, and many add *a sinner*. Breathe in on the first half and out on the second. Pray it walking, waiting, lying awake at three in the morning. When the full prayer is too much, *Lord, have mercy* will do. So will your own: *Lord, I can't. You can.*

### *The Examen*

Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, taught a short evening prayer for reviewing the day with God, and wrote careful guidance on what he called the discernment of spirits. Here is a simple form aimed at discernment:

1. **Be still.** Remember that God is with you, and ask for light (James 1:5).

2. **Give thanks.** Name one or two good things from the day.
3. **Notice what drew you closer.** When did you feel pulled toward love, peace and Jesus?
4. **Notice what pulled you away.** When did you feel fear, contempt or hurry, and what were you listening to then?
5. **Look toward tomorrow.** Ask for what you'll need, and ask once more, "Does this sound like Jesus?"

### *The Even-If Prayer*

Three men in front of a furnace told a king their God could rescue them, "but even if he doesn't," they still wouldn't bow (Daniel 3:18). Habakkuk prayed the same way over failed crops and empty barns: "yet I will rejoice in the LORD!" (Habakkuk 3:18).

Each morning, write one sentence: *Even if ___, I will trust You, Lord.* Fill in the blank honestly. Some days you'll write the second half with confidence. Some days you'll only manage the first half. Both get prayed.

### *Praying for the Hard-to-Love*

Jesus' instruction is short: "Pray for those who persecute you!" (Matthew 5:44). Many who practice it find that it changes the one praying, sometimes more than the one prayed for.

Choose one name. Each evening for two weeks, pray: *Lord, bless ___. Give them what they need. And soften me where I've gone hard.* You don't have to feel anything. You don't have to reconcile, either, especially with someone who isn't safe. You're placing them in God's hands, and leaving them there.

### *A Rule of Endurance*

Around the year 530, Benedict of Nursia wrote a rule for his monks. It shaped monastic life in the West for the next fifteen centuries, and Benedict, near the end of it, called it a little rule for beginners. A rule in this sense is closer to a trellis than a fence: a few chosen supports that hold you up while you grow.

Write yours on a single card.

- **Daily:** one small practice from this list.
- **Weekly:** one rhythm of rest, worship or time with others.
- **Monthly:** one person you'll check in with honestly.

Keep it small enough to survive a bad week. Review it once a month and adjust. Benedict expected beginners to keep beginning.

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#### FOR REFLECTION

1. Which one practice will you try for the next two weeks? Write it down along with the time of day you'll do it.
2. Which tradition's practice felt least familiar to you? What might that part of the family have to teach you?
3. Who could try a practice alongside you? Write their name, and when you'll ask them.

CHAPTER 8

# A Card for the Road

*Fill it in, cut it out, and keep it where you'll see it every day.*

CUT ALONG THE LINE

## My Rule of Endurance

*Small enough to survive a bad week.*

**DAILY** *one practice from Chapter 8, and when*

**WEEKLY** *one rhythm of rest, worship or time with others*

**MONTHLY** *one honest check-in*

**WALKING WITH** *the name of one person*

**BEGUN ON**

**REVIEW ON**

*"I press on to reach the end of the race." Philippians 3:14*

## A Benediction

You may have opened these pages tired. You may still be tired. Eight chapters can't change that, and they were never supposed to.

Endurance, in the end, is staying close. Some days you'll pray at the window as usual. Some days you'll only manage to sit in the ashes and argue. Both count, and the One you're staying close to has promised to finish what He started.

So take these blessings with you, one for each step of the road:

*May the God of hope steady your steps, calm your storms and anchor your soul in His unshakable love.*

*May the God of grace meet you in your weakness, lift you with His strength and carry you with His unfailing love.*

*May the Spirit of truth guard your mind, steady your heart and guide your steps in the way of Christ.*

*May the God who refines as fire sustain you in trial, strengthen your faith and make you steadfast until the day of Christ.*

*May the love of Christ keep your heart tender, your hands open and your light shining in a world that desperately needs His compassion.*

*May the God who began a good work in you give you strength to endure, hope to sustain and joy to finish strong, until the day you see Christ face to face.*

And may the old blessing from Hebrews, written to weary people a long way from home, rest on you now:

> *Now may the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)*

## For Groups: A Leader's Companion

This guide was written for one reader at a time, but it works well around a kitchen table or on a video call. A group can take it in six sessions:

| Session | Read before you meet |
|---|---|
| 1 | Chapter 1, For the One Who's Been Told to Hang On, and Chapter 2, Anchored |
| 2 | Chapter 3, Strength in Weakness |
| 3 | Chapter 4, Seeing Through the Fog |
| 4 | Chapter 5, Faith in the Fire |
| 5 | Chapter 6, Love in a Cold World |
| 6 | Chapter 7, Finishing Strong, and Chapter 8, Practices From the Whole Church |

Before each session, ask everyone to read the chapter, look up the Scripture Chain for that session, and try the chapter's Deeper Way to Pray on a few days. Nobody needs to finish everything. Come anyway.

FOR GROUPS

# Six Weeks at a Glance

*One companion from Scripture, one verse to carry, one way to pray and one thing to draw each week.*

SESSION 1

## Daniel

Chapters 1 and 2

*"This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls."* **Hebrews 6:19**

**PRAY** Silence
**DRAW** An anchor

SESSION 2

## Gideon

Chapter 3

*"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."* **2 Corinthians 12:9**

**PRAY** A breath prayer
**DRAW** A clay jar

SESSION 3

## The Bereans

Chapter 4

*"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you."* **James 1:5**

**PRAY** The Examen
**DRAW** A fruit tree

SESSION 4

## Job

Chapter 5

*"For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow."* **James 1:3**

**PRAY** The Even-If Prayer
**DRAW** A refiner's fire

SESSION 5

## Barnabas

Chapter 6

*"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God."* **1 John 4:7**

**PRAY** Praying for the hard-to-love
**DRAW** A basin and towel

SESSION 6

## Paul

Chapters 7 and 8

*"And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."* **Hebrews 12:1**

**PRAY** A Rule of Endurance
**DRAW** A cairn of stones

The key verses are the memory verses from the original six-week workbook. The full Scripture Chain for each session is in For Groups.

### *Notes for Every Session*

**1. Setting the tone.** Create a calm, unhurried atmosphere. Keep your voice soft and steady. People often carry more pressure than they admit, and a gentle tone helps them relax into the space.

For online meetings, invite everyone to settle in before you begin. Ask each person to take one slow breath. Encourage cameras on if possible, but don't pressure anyone who feels hesitant.

**2. What to listen for.** Pay attention to quiet hints of:

- burnout
- emotional exhaustion
- feeling spiritually adrift
- changes in life rhythm that leave someone unsettled

Online, watch nonverbal cues too. Someone may go quiet because the topic touches something tender. A simple "Are you still with us?" offered kindly can help them feel seen.

**3. When it's more than the group can carry.** If someone describes being harmed, or says something that makes you worry for their safety, don't try to handle it in the circle. Speak with them privately afterward and help them reach a counselor, a doctor or a pastor they trust. In the United States, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline takes calls and texts at any hour. Pointing someone toward help is part of caring for them.

**4. How to guide discussion.** Keep questions open and grounded in lived experience. Make room for silence, because people often need a moment to find their words. If the conversation drifts into debate, abstract ideas, politics or old church fights, gently bring it back to what people are actually carrying this week.

For online groups, invite responses with simple cues like raising a hand or typing "I'd like to share" in the chat. This keeps one person from accidentally dominating the conversation.

**5. How to handle emotion.** If someone becomes tearful, slow things down. Say, "Thank you for trusting us with that." You don't need to fix the feeling. You only need to give it a safe place to land.

Online, if someone cries or goes quiet, pause. Ask gently, "Would you like a moment?" Let them choose how much to share. This honors their dignity.

**6. How to keep Christ at the center.** Bring the group back to the heart of each session. Keep the conversation rooted in His presence rather than in self-help solutions. Steadiness grows from staying close to Jesus, and the group is one of the places that happens.

**7. Closing the gathering.** Invite each person to name one thing they want to carry into the week. Keep it simple. Online, you can go around the screen or let people type theirs in the chat.

Close with a short prayer such as: "Jesus, steady us. Help us stay close to You in the days ahead."

**8. A final blessing for the group.** "May you feel the calm strength of Christ holding you when the world feels unsteady."

# Session 1: Hang On, and Anchored

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

### *Scripture Chain*

Psalm 62:5-6 → Isaiah 33:6 → Matthew 7:24-25 → Colossians 2:6-7 → Hebrews 6:19
*Christ is our anchor and firm foundation when the world shakes.*

### *For Conversation Together*

When we speak honestly about our lives, something steady begins to grow between us. God often uses simple conversation to calm anxious hearts and remind us that we're not walking alone. Let these questions open a safe place for your group to share their stories, with kindness and without pressure.

1. Chapter 1 describes "endurance" being used to keep people quiet. Has that word, or one like it, ever been used on you that way?
2. Where have you felt most unsteady in the past few months?
3. What helps your heart settle when life speeds up and you feel pulled in too many directions?
4. Daniel prayed three times a day. What daily rhythm helps you stay connected to Christ?
5. When do you notice yourself drifting toward "false anchors" like comfort or distraction?
6. What part of these two chapters spoke to you the most, and why?
7. Where have you experienced Christ holding you steady even when your emotions were shaky?
8. How can the group pray for your sense of steadiness this week?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

The first session sets the tone for the whole group. People often arrive carrying restlessness or uncertainty they haven't said out loud. Your role this week is to help them slow down, breathe, and notice the places where Christ is already holding them steady.

**1. Expect mixed emotions.** Some members will be eager to dive in. Others will feel nervous or unsure what to share. A few may realize, maybe for the first time, how unsteady their hearts feel. Give everyone permission to start exactly where they are.

**2. Handle Chapter 1 with care.** Some people in the room may still be in a church that hurt them. Others may have left and feel guilty about it. Let both speak. Don't steer anyone toward leaving or staying. The chapter's point is that Jesus is near either way.

**3. Keep the pace gentle.** Leave problem-solving for another day. This session is for helping people name where they feel adrift. Speak slowly. Leave small pockets of silence. That helps the group settle into the theme of anchoring.

**4. Highlight Daniel's example quietly.** When discussion drifts toward "big storms," bring people back to the simple image of Daniel praying three times a day, "as usual." Steadiness grows in small, faithful rhythms more than in dramatic heroics.

**5. Guide people away from self-criticism.** Many will admit they feel distracted, inconsistent or spiritually scattered. Gently redirect them from shame toward honesty and hope. Say something like, "You're learning to notice where Christ wants to steady you. That's good."

**6. Watch for the desire to "fix" others.** Someone may try to offer quick advice. Redirect with, "Let's listen to their story for a moment first." This session is about being anchored together. The storms can wait.

**7. Hold space for quiet members.** If someone says, "I don't know where I'm anchored," affirm their honesty. That's a good place to start from.

**8. For online groups.** Encourage shorter shares this week so everyone opens up at least once. Watch for downcast eyes or quiet hesitation. Offer small invitations like, "We'd love to hear from you if you feel comfortable."

**9. End with a grounding moment and a short prayer.** Invite everyone to place a hand over their heart and breathe once, the way Chapter 2 suggests. Say, "Christ holds you steady. You are not drifting." Then pray, "Jesus, anchor us in Your presence. Let every restless heart find a steady place in You."

# Session 2: Strength in Weakness

CHAPTER 3

### *Scripture Chain*

Judges 7:2 → Isaiah 40:29-31 → Psalm 73:26 → Philippians 4:13 → 2 Corinthians 12:9
*God's power is revealed most clearly in our weakness.*

### *For Conversation Together*

Most of us learned early to hide our weak spots. This session asks the group to do the opposite, gently, and only as far as each person wants to go. Let honesty be enough. Nobody has to share their hardest thing.

1. Who taught you, by words or by example, that admitting weakness was a bad idea?
2. Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress, out of sight. Where have you been "threshing in hiding" lately?
3. God called Gideon a mighty hero before he had done anything brave. How does it land for you to be named by God ahead of time like that?
4. Isaiah's list goes soar, run, walk. Which of the three describes your strength this season?
5. Paul asked three times for the thorn to go and was told no. Have you prayed a prayer like that? What has living with the answer been like?
6. Where have you seen strength show up in your life that you know wasn't your own?
7. Elijah's recovery started with food and sleep. What does your body need this week that you've been ignoring?
8. How can the group pray for you in one place where you feel weak right now?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

This session can feel exposing. People are being asked to name weakness out loud, often for the first time in a group. Your calm matters more than your answers.

**1. Go first, and keep it small.** If you share, share something real but modest. A leader who names a small, honest weakness gives everyone else permission. A leader who shares a dramatic confession can make others feel they have to match it.

**2. Watch for the "but I'm fine" reflex.** Some people will name a weakness and immediately cover it with a joke or a reassurance. You don't need to call that out. A quiet "Thanks for saying that" lets the honest part stand.

**3. Keep burnout in view.** Some in the room may be worn out by church work itself: serving in too many places, carrying programs nobody else will. Make room for that to be said without it turning into a complaint session about any particular church.

**4. Don't rush to Philippians 4:13.** Someone may reach for "I can do everything through Christ" as a pep talk. Gently point back to the chapter's reading, where Paul wrote it about going hungry.

**5. Honor the body.** If someone describes exhaustion that has gone on for months, encourage them, privately if needed, to see a doctor. That's part of taking weakness seriously.

**6. For online groups.** Silence can feel longer on a screen. Let it. If you need to break it, try, "Anyone want to go first, even with something small?"

**7. End with the breath prayer.** Invite everyone to breathe slowly together three times, praying silently, "Lord, I can't" on the breath in and "You can" on the breath out.

**8. A simple prayer for the end.** "Lord, You know where each of us is weak tonight. Meet us there, and give us the strength we don't have."

# Session 3: Seeing Through the Fog

CHAPTER 4

### *Scripture Chain*

Proverbs 14:15 → Matthew 7:15-16 → Acts 17:11 → 1 John 4:1 → James 1:5
*Wisdom discerns truth from lies by testing everything against God's Word.*

### *For Conversation Together*

This session touches places where people have been misled, sometimes by leaders they loved. Some will feel foolish for having trusted. Others will feel angry. Let the conversation stay on what each person has learned and is learning, rather than on naming and judging particular people.

1. Proverbs warns that the simple believe everything. Others of us have been burned and now believe almost nothing. Which way do you tend to lean?
2. Jesus said you can tell a tree by its fruit, "by the way they act." What fruit do you notice in the voices you listen to most?
3. The Bereans were eager and careful at the same time. What would it look like for you to hold both?
4. When you hear something persuasive, do you pause to ask, "Does this sound like Jesus?" What recent example comes to mind?
5. James says God "will not rebuke you for asking." Has a question of yours ever been treated as a problem? What happened?
6. Who in your life consistently points you back to Scripture, the way the Bereans did? What have you learned from them?
7. Where do you most need to ask God for clarity right now?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

Discernment is a tender subject for people who have been deceived. Your job is to keep the room safe enough for honesty and steady enough that it doesn't become a trial of absent people.

**1. Expect old wounds.** Someone may describe a pastor, a ministry or a movement that misled them. Listen. Thank them. Avoid adding your own verdict on the people involved, especially if they are well known.

**2. Keep it out of politics.** This topic pulls hard toward the news. If the conversation starts sorting public figures into true and false prophets, gently bring it back: "Let's stay with what we can see in our own lives this week."

**3. Watch for shame.** People who trusted the wrong voice often blame themselves. Remind the group that wolves are dangerous precisely because they look like sheep. Being fooled by a good disguise is not a character flaw.

**4. Model the Berean posture.** Invite people to check what is said in the group, including what you say, against Scripture. Keep a Bible open. It teaches more than any warning could.

**5. Don't let discernment curdle into suspicion.** If the group starts sounding cynical about everyone, point back to the Bereans: they listened eagerly before they checked. Openness is part of discernment too.

**6. For online groups.** Someone may want to share a link or video as an example. Gently ask the group not to, so the session stays about your own lives and not a debate over a clip.

**7. End by listening for His voice.** Read John 10:27 aloud slowly: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Then allow a minute of quiet.

**8. A simple prayer for the end.** "Jesus, we want to know Your voice. Clear the fog, and lead us where You are going."

# Session 4: Faith in the Fire

CHAPTER 5

### *Scripture Chain*

Job 23:10 → Psalm 34:19 → Isaiah 43:2 → Romans 5:3-4 → James 1:2-4 → 1 Peter 1:6-7
*Trials refine our faith and produce endurance that lasts.*

### *For Conversation Together*

Some people in your group are in a long trial right now, and others are carrying one they've never talked about. Leave solving for another day. This session is for sitting on the ground together for a while, the way Job's friends did before they started talking.

1. Has James 1:2, "consider it an opportunity for great joy," ever been said to you at the wrong moment? What would you have rather heard?
2. Job said "Praise the name of the LORD" and, days later, cursed the day he was born. Have you ever prayed both kinds of prayers close together?
3. Job couldn't find God in any direction, but trusted that God knew where he was going. When have you felt that way?
4. God told Job's friends they had not spoken accurately about Him, and that Job had. What does that say about honest complaint?
5. Psalm 34:19 says the righteous face many troubles. How has God met you in past trials, and how does that shape the way you face this one?
6. The three men said, "even if he doesn't." What would your own Even-If sentence be this week?
7. Who do you know in a long trial right now, and how could you sit with them this week?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

This may be the heaviest session of the six. Plan to go slowly and to end on time, so nobody leaves drained.

**1. Expect real pain in the room.** Illness, grief, caregiving, a marriage ending, a child in trouble. Someone may share something for the first time. Receive it simply: "Thank you for trusting us with that."

**2. Guard against quick comfort.** Group members may reach for verses or silver linings to make the pain smaller. Gently slow that down. Remind the group that Job's friends were at their best when they were silent.

**3. Don't promise outcomes.** Avoid suggesting that enough faith will end anyone's trial. The chapter leaves room for what isn't restored. Let the group leave room for it too.

**4. Know when to refer.** If someone's grief or darkness sounds like more than a group can carry, follow up privately and help them reach a counselor, a doctor or a grief support group.

**5. Let anger be spoken.** Someone may be angry at God. Job was too, and God said he spoke accurately. You don't need to correct the anger. You can let it be prayer.

**6. For online groups.** Heavy sharing on a screen can leave people feeling alone afterward. Consider sending a short text the next day to anyone who shared something hard.

**7. End with the Even-If sentence.** Invite anyone willing to say their Even-If sentence aloud. Let others simply listen. No one has to finish the second half.

**8. A simple prayer for the end.** "Lord, some of us are in the fire tonight. Be the one walking around in it with us."

# Session 5: Love in a Cold World

CHAPTER 6

### *Scripture Chain*

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 → Proverbs 10:12 → Matthew 24:12-13 → John 13:34-35 → Romans 12:9-10 → Colossians 3:12-14
*Love keeps our hearts tender when the world grows cold.*

### *For Conversation Together*

Everyone in the room has someone who is hard for them to love, and most have someone who found them hard to love once. Keep this conversation about our own hearts, and gentle with the people who aren't here to speak for themselves.

1. Where have you noticed coldness creeping into your own heart lately? What started it?
2. Jesus said the love of many would grow cold. Where do you see that happening among Christians today, including on your own side of things?
3. Barnabas stood beside Saul when the church was afraid of him. Who has stood beside you like that?
4. Paul and Barnabas split over John Mark. Have you ever had to part ways with someone you respected? How did you do it, and how do you feel about it now?
5. Deuteronomy calls God's people to love the foreigner and the vulnerable. Who is overlooked in your community right now?
6. Jesus washed Judas's feet. What does that do to your picture of love?
7. Who is one person you could encourage this week, the way Barnabas would?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

This session invites people to look at relationships that hurt. Some will be estranged from family, some from churches, some from friends over politics. Keep the focus on what God is doing in each person's heart.

**1. Don't let it become a complaint session.** Stories about difficult people can run long. Acknowledge the hurt, then gently ask, "Where do you sense God inviting you in this?"

**2. Protect the boundaries.** Someone may feel pressured by this chapter to reconcile with a person who harmed them. Say clearly that praying for someone is different from returning to an unsafe relationship. Romans 12:18 says "all that you can," and that includes limits.

**3. Keep politics at arm's length.** Question 2 can pull toward naming groups or public figures. If it does, steer back to the group's own hearts: "Where has that coldness shown up in us?"

**4. Celebrate the Barnabases.** Give time for people to name those who encouraged them. Gratitude for past kindness can soften the room for the harder questions.

**5. Watch for compassion fatigue.** Some people are cold because they've given until they're empty, especially caregivers. They may need rest more than a challenge to love more.

**6. For online groups.** Invite people to type the first name, or just the initials, of someone they want to pray for. Then pray over those names together.

**7. End with encouragement.** Before you close, go around the group and have each person say one specific, encouraging thing to the person on their left, or the next name on the screen.

**8. A simple prayer for the end.** "Lord, where we've gone cold, warm us. Make us people who stand beside the ones nobody trusts yet."

# Session 6: Finishing Strong, and Practice

CHAPTERS 7 AND 8

### *Scripture Chain*

Psalm 73:24 → Isaiah 40:31 → Philippians 3:13-14 → Hebrews 12:1-2 → 2 Timothy 4:7-8 → Revelation 2:10
*Endurance finishes the race with eyes fixed on Jesus and hope that endures.*

### *For Conversation Together*

This is the last session, so leave room to look back as well as ahead. Give people a chance to say what has changed, even slightly, and what they want to carry with them when the group ends.

1. Has anyone ever told you that leaving or struggling meant you'd "quit the race"? How does Hebrews 12 speak to that?
2. Hebrews separates the weights that slow us down from sin. What weight, not necessarily wrong, are you ready to set down?
3. Paul's last letter asks for a coat and some books, and forgives the people who abandoned him. What strikes you about that picture of finishing strong?
4. Psalm 73:24 says God guides us with His counsel. Where have you seen His guidance over these six weeks?
5. Which practice from Chapter 8 are you choosing for the next two weeks?
6. Share your Rule of Endurance, if you're willing. What's one daily, one weekly and one person on it?
7. Look at your cairn of stones. What is one way God has helped you get this far?

### *Notes for Group Leaders*

Endings matter. Some people will feel sad that the group is ending, and some will feel relieved. Both are fine.

**1. Look back first.** Give the first part of the session to the question, "What has changed, even slightly, since we started?" Small answers count.

**2. Gently correct the "quitter" story.** If someone believes leaving a church meant failing God, point back to the chapter: God sets the race, and the crowd of witnesses is full of nomads.

**3. Help people choose a practice.** Some will want to try everything. Encourage each person to pick one practice for two weeks, with a time of day attached.

**4. Pair people up.** Invite members to choose one person from the group to check in with in two weeks, about whether their practice is holding.

**5. Decide what happens next.** Talk together about whether to meet again: a reunion in a month, a new study, or simply a group text. Don't promise more than the group can keep.

**6. For online groups.** Consider ending with cameras on and a moment of silence together, then let people leave in their own time instead of closing the call abruptly.

**7. Read the Benediction aloud.** Close by reading the six blessings at the end of the guide, with a pause after each, then the blessing from Hebrews 13:20-21.

**8. A simple prayer for the end.** "Jesus, You started this in us, and You'll finish it. Keep our eyes on You, and bring each of us home."

# Notes

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## CHAPTER 1

*Hupomonē* (Strong's G5281) comes from *hupomenō*, built from *hupo*, "under," and *menō*, "to remain" (G3306). See HELPS Word-studies, which glosses it "remaining under, endurance; steadfastness." *Menō* is the verb the NLT translates "remain" throughout John 15:4-10.

The author of Hebrews is unknown, and scholars debate who first received the letter. The description of its readers here comes from the letter itself (Hebrews 10:32-36; 12:3, 12).

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (United States): call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org.

## CHAPTER 2

Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* (*The Instructor*) 3.11, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. The list of ring images is paraphrased from the English translation. The date (about AD 190 to 200) is approximate.

Daniel's age is an estimate. Daniel 1:1-4 dates the deportation to the third year of Jehoiakim (about 605 BC) and calls the captives "young men" without giving an age. Babylon fell in 539 BC.

Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-9). "Close to fifty years" assumes the events of Daniel 6 come shortly after 539 BC.

"Darius the Mede" has no certain match in other ancient records, and scholars have proposed several identifications.

## CHAPTER 3

The thorn in 2 Corinthians 12:7 has never been identified. Proposals include an eye ailment (sometimes linked to Galatians 4:13-15), another chronic illness, a speech difficulty, and persistent opponents.

The Jesus Prayer: the short form used here ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me") is common, and many add "a sinner," echoing Luke 18:13. The prayer is associated with the Orthodox hesychast tradition gathered in *The Philokalia* (compiled by Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth, 1782) and made widely known by the anonymous nineteenth-century Russian book *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

Philippians was written while Paul was in custody (Philippians 1:13). Where and when is debated: Rome, Ephesus and Caesarea have all been proposed.

Isaiah 40-55 is often attributed by scholars to a prophet writing during or after the Babylonian exile, while many readers hold to the traditional view that it is Isaiah's work. This guide says "the prophet in Isaiah 40" and leaves the question open.

## CHAPTER 4

The NLT's "that is, by the way they act" (Matthew 7:16) is the translators' explanation of "fruit." It is a fair gloss, and other translations simply read "by their fruits."

Acts 17:11 in many translations calls the Bereans "more noble" (Greek *eugenesteroi*). The NLT renders it "more open-minded."

Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," §313-336, and the general examen, §43. The two-question form used here is a common simplified version, not Ignatius's own wording.

## CHAPTER 5

*Consider* in James 1:2 translates the Greek *hēgeomai*, "to regard, reckon or count," which is why older translations read "count it all joy."

James 5:11 uses *hupomonē* for Job's "great endurance," the same word discussed in Chapter 1.

The identity of the fourth figure in the furnace (Daniel 3:25) has been read in different ways. The NLT footnote gives the Aramaic as "like a son of the gods." Many Christian interpreters have seen in it a preincarnate appearance of Christ, and others read it as an angel (compare Daniel 3:28).

## CHAPTER 6

The letters of John are traditionally attributed to the apostle John in his old age. Authorship and dating are debated.

Acts 11:22-26 is paraphrased in this chapter, not quoted.

John 13 says Jesus washed "the disciples' feet" while Judas was present at the meal (John 13:2, 21-30). That Jesus washed Judas's feet is a reasonable reading of the account, but the text doesn't name him in that moment.

## CHAPTER 7

Second Timothy presents itself as Paul's letter from prison near the end of his life, and tradition places it in Rome. Many scholars think it was written by a follower of Paul in his name, while others defend Paul's authorship.

"Author and finisher" (Hebrews 12:2) is the King James Version's wording. The NLT reads "the champion who initiates and perfects our faith."

Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980). Peterson took the phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188.

The Rule of Saint Benedict was written around AD 530. Its final chapter (73) describes it as a modest rule written for beginners. The wording in this guide is paraphrased, since translations vary.

## CHAPTER 8

*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), Moses 6. Wording varies slightly between translations.

The Rule of Saint Benedict, chapter 16, cites Psalm 119:164 ("seven times a day") as the basis for the monastic hours of prayer.

Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, §43 and §313-336. The five-step Examen given here is a modern simplification aimed at discernment.

## BENEDICTION

The six blessings are adapted from the weekly closing blessings in the 2025 workbook edition of *Everyday Endurance*.

## Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts

*Take these slowly. Write in the Faith Journal or on the lines below. What matters is that each question gets an honest answer somewhere.*

**1 Who taught you what endurance means, and what did they want you to endure?**

Write down who it was and what they asked of you. Then, next to it, write what Hebrews says endurance is for: staying close to Jesus.

**PRAYER PROMPT**

*"Lord, people told me to hang on when what they wanted was for me to be quiet. Teach me what it means to hang on to You."*

**2 What false anchor have you been gripping hardest?**

Name it plainly: approval, being right, a movement, a screen, staying busy. Then write one small way you could loosen your grip this week.

**PRAYER PROMPT**

*"Jesus, I've been holding on to things that drag along the bottom. Help me let go of one, and hold me while I do."*

**3 What argument with God have you been afraid to say out loud?**

Write it the way Job would have, without softening it. God called Job's honesty accurate. Yours is welcome too.

**PRAYER PROMPT**

*"God, You let Job argue with You. Here's mine. Please stay in the room while I say it."*

**4 Who is hard for you to love right now?**

Write their name, and one thing you could ask God to give them. If this person isn't safe for you, praying for them doesn't mean letting them back in.

**PRAYER PROMPT**

*"Lord, You know what this person did. I can't feel warm toward them yet. I'll start by asking You to bless them, and You can do the rest."*

**5 Which one practice from Chapter 8 will you try for the next two weeks?**

Write it down with a time of day, like with the first cup of coffee or before you open your phone. Then put a reminder on your calendar to come back and see what changed, even slightly.

**PRAYER PROMPT**

*"Lord, I've started plenty of things and dropped them. Help me keep this one small thing, as usual, the way Daniel did."*

## A Blessing for the Road

*May the God who sees the wanderer find you wherever you are tonight.*

*May Christ, who never needed you to have it all together, meet you in the questions you're still carrying.*

*May the Spirit steady your feet when the noise gets loud, and quiet your heart when the world won't.*

*Go gently. Tell the truth. Love the ones in front of you.*

*And when you fall, and you will, may grace be the first thing you find when you get back up.*

## You're Always Welcome Here

If this helped, don't carry it alone. Write your answers in the Faith Journal, free and private. Share this with someone who's wandering. And come find us at faithoverfactions.com, on Substack, Facebook, Bluesky, and Instagram.

Faith Journal

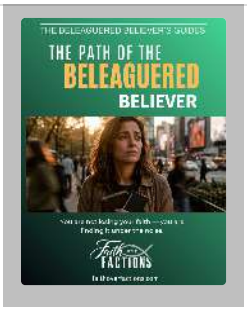
This piece online

### The porch light is always on.

## Take Something for the Road

You don't have to walk this alone, and you don't have to pay to keep going. Here are a few companions for the journey. Three are free. No email address, no catch.

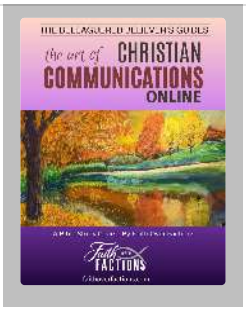
### THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES




**The Path of the Beleaguered Believer**

"You are not losing your faith, you are finding it under the noise." For the one who keeps getting up.

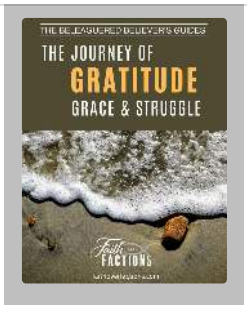
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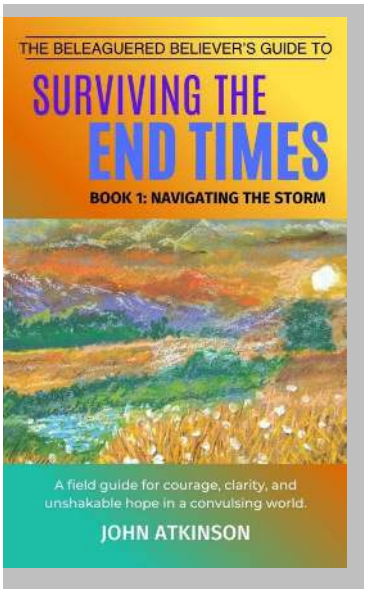
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