

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 20, 2013 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

FAITH TO ENDURE IN TIMES LIKE THESE
Finishing a Task
2 Timothy 4:6-8, Hebrews 12:1-3

In Times Like These
By Ruth Caye Jones

In times like these you need a Savior, In times like these you need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

We are living in tough times, and it doesn't take a lot of discernment to know that. We began our study on "Faith to Endure in Times Like These" last week by look at the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. He tells us in no uncertain times that "difficult times" are upon us. How does the Christian cope? What are the techniques that spur us on and keep us stable? The Apostle Paul's final words of counsel offer wise advice in times like these.

"¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." – 2 Timothy 4:1-5 (NIV)

The world we've described needs many who will take a stand. God uses such ones of His to influence their surrounding regions. In what ways?

Practical Advice On How Taking A Stand Makes a Difference:

1. **Being unique makes an impact** – Different stand out, and Christians are different. If you aren't different on some level something is wrong... something is missing. Christians go against the flow, they work against the grain... not just for the sake of being different, but we

are different by design. Remember that as a Christian, this is not your home... you are a stranger, an alien here. That means you are different and people notice different. It has an impact.

2. **Being pure provides a model** – And by being pure we mean, being right, doing what's right, not just professing it but living it. Something that is pure, is genuine, real, it 100 proof, concentrate. It is the real deal! Our being "pure" in our lives as a Christian is a great witness to those who don't know Him, but it also a great witness and encouragement to those who do and may be struggling.
3. **Being consistent keep us stable** – The more consistent you are over and over the easier it gets to be consistent. If we will become habitual Christians in our walk you will find that doing the right thing and living it becomes a little easier all the time. That doesn't mean that there won't be times when the enemy will try to rob you of your joy and trip you up, tempt you, and attack you. That will happen! It is inevitable! But the more consistent you are the more stable in your Christian walk you will find yourself becoming.
4. **Bing committed gives us determination** – Listen, it's not going to be easy. There are going to be times when you get weary and tired and may even want to sit down in the race, but if you have a made a prior commitment it will keep you going. Those who are truly committed find that extra something and are able to dig down deep and keep going with the going gets tough.

To hang in there in times like ours is a rugged assignment. It calls for commitment and hard-line determination. Thoroughness is a rare quality of character. Completing a project with gusto and enthusiasm is unusual in our just-get-by world. Many a school paper, many a course, many a promise bears the ominous mark... incomplete. Ask any foreman, any manager. Their number one problem is personnel... finding people they can trust to do a job without cutting corners and dodging the difficult details of their work. Starters are a dime a dozen, but it's hard to find one terminator, especially when there is no extra pay, when it requires an extra thirty minutes after quitting time, or if on one will ever notice. In our day we need folks like Paul who "finish the course."

COMMON RESPONSES TO PRESSURE

When facing time which are harsh and hard to handle, three reactions are usually expressed.

3 Reactions to Pressure:

1. **Indifference** – If we are not careful the challenges we face in this day and age, the pressure from those challenges, the daily difficulties we face can cause us to develop a callused "apathy"... a "shrugging of the shoulders" kind of reaction that says, "Can't do anything about this anyway!" Often this reaction of indifference and apathy may be a sign of deeper issues, perhaps even discouragement or depression and the circumstances one finds themselves in that may lead them to feel helpless. This reaction to pressures and challenges says, "Don't sweat it... it will either go away or things will work themselves out! You can't do anything about it anyway! Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be, Will Be)!" ***What is the problem with this reaction?*** Indifference and passivity are cousins. **Indifference often result in irresponsibility.**

Example... Judas: John 12:1-6 (focus vv.4-6), “⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

2. **Impulsiveness** – Sometimes the challenges of dealing with what life can hand us especially in our present day and age can lead us to react impulsively...impetuously, rashly, or carelessly. And acting impulsively can get us into trouble quick. We may make rash decisions that are not in the best interest of ourselves or others. We can actually do much more harm than good and cause a bad situation to get worse. This rash reaction may say, “Do something, even if it’s wrong. Run when it gets hard and tough. Enough is enough. I’m leaving, regardless of the consequences.” **What is the problem with this reaction?** **Impulsiveness often leads to disobedience.**

Example... Peter: John 13:1-9 (focus vv. 6-9), “⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ ⁷Jesus replied, ‘You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ ⁸‘No,’ said Peter, ‘you shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’ ⁹‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’” **John 13:31-38 (focus v. 37),** “³⁷Peter asked, ‘Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’”

3. **Insecurity... causing conformity** – Certainly, the pressures we face because of the kind of world we live in and the challenges we face in that world can make us insecure, fearful, and filled with doubt. This can lead us to hide rather than be bold in who we are in Christ, and shrink back rather than stand even for what we believe in. This fearful reaction says, “Watch what others are doing and then do that... don’t be too different... just try to fit in!” **What is the problem with this reaction?** In the process the conformist sells his soul, failing to stand for something and maintain uniqueness. This reaction is dictated often by peer pressure. **Insecurity will often cause conformity.**

Example... Thomas: John 11:1-16 (focus v.16), “¹⁶Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” **John 14:1-5 (focus v.5),** “⁵Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’” **John 20:19-25 (focus vv.24-25),** “²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’”

BIBLICAL COUNSEL ON DETERMINATION (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Difficult and challenging times require strong measures. From Paul’s thoughts penned at the close of his life, we can draw four helpful guidelines for finishing well... those accepting God’s challenges to not cave in or quit but to finish tasks.

⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” -2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NIV)

4 Helpful Guidelines For Believer Who Desire To Finish Well:

1. **Face facts realistically (v.6) -** “*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.*” Paul wrote Timothy from a Roman dungeon, with death breathing down his neck. Knowing that, he faced the facts. He did not engage in denial. No one finishes strong who lives in a dream world. Denial weakens determination, while to be strong is to think realistically and face the facts with real determination. A good example might be in a marriage relationship... think about it... thinking realistically is to acknowledge, “We are different... (different sexes, male and female... from different backgrounds, from different families, raised differently, wired differently, etc.), therefore we will not always agree.” What’s true here is true also in other realms of life. We must live with the fact that we aren’t perfect, and neither are those around us. We must also give up trying to do everything perfectly. There are going to be times we struggle and perhaps even fall and fall hard. That is not the time to give up, nor throw in the towel. We must realistically face that facts that there will be challenges, hardships, trials, fights, struggles, and we may even stumble through some of those and some will inevitably trip us up. Listen, don’t give up. Keep going!
2. **Be committed to finishing what you start (v.7) –** Reviewing his life, Paul wrote in vs. 7, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*” Finishing and finishing well requires three ingredients.

3 Required Ingredients in the Recipe for Finishing:

- (1) Durability... being tough – “*...fought the good fight...*”
- (2) Direction... having a plan (or recognizing God has one and yielding in surrender to His plan) – “*...finished the race (course)...*”
- (3) Determination... walking with God – “*...kept the faith.*”

A Broader Perspective: Being a finisher will result in a range of exacting disciplines which are both gratifying and worth the struggle. Two penetrating questions: How many unfinished projects lay around you? How thorough are you in the process of getting them accomplished? Unfinished projects drain our emotional energy because they can take from us the excitement for other plans that could be fulfilling and challenging. Realize a couple of things with unfinished projects:

3 Things To Remember in Challenging Unfinished Projects:

- (1) Some things take time... so don’t be discouraged –
- (2) Sometimes the enemy (Satan) will throw up obstacles and hindrances to keep what is unfinished, unfinished... so resist him and stand firm -
- (3) Sometimes God is casting a bigger vision than our original vision was... so take another prayerful look at it and wait on Him -

3. **Focus on the future when the present is difficult (v.8a)** – The apostle said it this way, ^{8a}*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day...*" Paul could realistically see that death for him was imminent, yet he chose to look beyond that particular event to something hopeful. Practically speaking, this should work for us also. When we are faced with challenging circumstances it is best for us to realize and refocus on some things... namely that ultimately we will one day be in His presence and this challenge will be in rearview mirror only. Remember we win in the end! We come out victorious in the end! This perspective may help us to keep going now... fighting the good fight... finishing the course well.

- (1) Engaged in education? *Focus on graduating!*
- (2) Rearing children? *Focus on the product!*
- (3) Having a tough time in a relationship? *Focus on the benefits that will grow out of the struggle!*
- (4) Facing surgery? *Focus on the impending relief!*

A Tip for Focusing: One of the very best ways to cement your focus is to pray... to talk to God. Praying emphasizes hope. God doesn't benefit from it... we do! He never learns a thing when we pray. The benefit of prayer is the therapy that results in us when we unload our burdens upon Him. That's the way He wants it. Remember Peter said in ¹ Peter 5:7, ⁷*Cast all your anxiety (care) on him because he cares for you.*"

4. **Realize you are not the only one standing firm (v.8b)** – Observe the words at the end of verse 8, ^{8b}*...and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*" The apostle, aware that his earthly life was soon to cease, was also aware that he was not the only one taking a stand. One of the most demoralizing battles of life is the feeling that we are alone in the struggle we are facing. But we are not. There are others engaged in the same battle as we are, scattered across the earth.

A GOOD WORD ON FINISHING WELL

The God inspired writer of the book of Hebrews gives some good solid and sound counsel to believers who wish to run the race and finish well. Although the race of the Christian life is not one free of obstacles and challenges, neither does God leave us to flounder and struggle along without the help we need to finish and finish well. In Hebrews 2:1-3 the writer of Hebrews gives us some sound advice on finishing well.

¹*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

4 Pieces of Sound Advice on Finishing Well:

1. **Study the example of those who have gone before you** – Scripture is replete with examples of man Godly men and women of faith who faced many of the same struggles and challenges we face today and finished well. As a matter of fact, their names appear in the previous chapter of Hebrews... the great faith chapter, Hebrews 11. These serve as reminders not only of the struggles themselves, but that we can come out victorious and with faith intact in the end.
2. **Make every effort to get rid of all personal baggage that hinders you in the race** - As the writer of Hebrews says in verse 1 of our passage, “*...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...*” Sometimes the things that hinder us in the Christ life are of our own making... choice we make, sins we refuse to acknowledge, confess and get rid of, attitudes, behaviors, etc. We must make every effort we can to be in right relationship with God through living, walking, running according to God’s Word and the principles and standards that He clearly lays out for in His Word.
3. **Be patient and don’t give up** – Remember you are working on His time table and not your own. That is important to remember. Things don’t always work out like we thought and don’t always happen according to our plans. That is because as believers we are not working on our own agenda, but His. This is about Him, not us! The idea of “perseverance” implies that there will be some things to have to persevere... some things that will perhaps tempt us to want to throw in the towel and get discourage in the race.
4. **Keep your full focus on Jesus** – Be best thing you can do to ensure a good finish is to keep focused on Jesus in every conceivable way. Focus on Him! In good times and bad make it about Jesus! Study Jesus. Get to know Jesus. Watch Him, look to Him, serve Him, walk with Him. Keep your full focus on Jesus Christ and you will finish well.

WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE QUITTING

2 Things To Do When You Feel Like Quitting:

1. **Take a few minutes to count your blessing** – Such periodic stop-offs spur us on.
2. **Remind yourself that whatever is worth having is worth the sacrifice** – The process is just as vital as the product (end result).