

Your Faith Under Fire Pt 2

1 Peter 1:6-9 (06/05/16)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

Many of us know Eric Liddell as the Scottish Olympian who refused to run on Sunday. He won gold and set a record for the 400-meter race in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. What we may not know is what he did after that. Eric was born in China to missionary parents. A year after the 1924 Olympics, he followed in their footsteps. He sailed to China and joyfully ministered to impoverished Chinese. In the early 1940s the Japanese were invading China and life was getting dangerous. In 1941 his wife Florence and their two children with a third on the way returned to Canada. Eric never saw his unborn daughter. In 1943 the Japanese placed Eric and other missionaries and westerners in an internment camp. However, Eric's missionary work didn't stop. He organized Bible and science classes for the young, who called him Uncle Eric. He became a peacemaker among quarreling missionaries, shamed some rich prisoners to share their smuggled eggs, and helped the elderly in the camp. One author who was with him in the camp and wrote a book about it described Eric as "the finest Christian gentleman it has been my pleasure to meet. In all the time in the camp, I never heard him say a bad word about anybody." (Wikipedia) On February 21, 1945, Eric crossed the finish line that really counts, dying of a brain tumor in that camp just months before the end of the war. His last words were, "It is surrender." Eric won Olympic gold in 1924, but his faith in Christ was proven through distressing trials; his love and devotion to Christ were more precious than any amount of gold in this world!

Last week we began looking in 1 Peter 1:6-9 about "Your Faith Under Fire." God will test our faith. He probably tested your faith this week. Trials come in a multitude of colors. Kevin DeYoung reported this week that he has just been diagnosed with Celiac disease. For a guy who lived on pizzas, crispy crème donuts, and Chick-fil-A sandwiches, life suddenly took a whole new direction for Kevin. God has stuff to teach Kevin he couldn't learn without this trial, and the same is true for you and me. The most important purpose of all of God's trials is to make you and me like His Son Jesus Christ.

Let's do a quick review from last week:

1 Peter 1:6-7, 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

First, God says regardless of what else is going on in your life, you have reason to rejoice – 1:6a. "In this you greatly rejoice."

Second, God assures you He will bring trials and difficulties into your life – 1:6b.

- They will be temporary – "though now, for a little while."
- They are necessary – "if necessary." God knows what kind of trials we need.
- They come in many different kinds or "colors" – "by various trials." God doesn't use cookie cutter trials. Job's trials were different from Abraham's trials; your trials are uniquely tailored by God for you.
- They may be very difficult – "you are distressed by various trials." God has not promised you a trouble free life. This is not your best life. You have to wait for heaven for the trials to stop!

God has a purpose for every distressful circumstance He sends your way – 1:7 *so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

- God will use these trials to prove the genuineness of your faith.
- God will use these trials to purify your faith so that you become more like His Son.
- God will use these trials to prepare you to give a good account when Jesus is unveiled!

Trial Trail Stop #1 – Before we conclude 1 Peter 1:8-9 this morning, I want to take you down what I call God’s Trial Trail. The first stop is here in 1 Peter. There will be three other stops along the Trial Trail and at each stop we will find the same word – endurance. The Greek word for endurance, “hupomeno,” literally means “to remain under” something. God uses trials, difficulties, hardships, and tests in our lives to build the muscles of our faith. Those muscles are called endurance. God is strengthening your faith so you don’t quit. A great part of becoming like Christ is learning to endure, to joyfully hang in there and keep obeying God regardless of your feelings, mood, or desires to the contrary. Let’s go to the next stop on the Trial Trail and keep your eyes peeled for the marker called “endurance” or “perseverance.”

STOP #2 - Romans 5:3, *And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations (pressures), knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance (endurance).* To exult or rejoice here means to have a hearty confidence, almost a boast, in God and all of His grace and goodness in your life. Eric Liddell illustrated this joy and sparkling humor regardless of his surroundings or even the cantankerous people in the internment camp with him.

In Romans 5:1 Paul has just described that great doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Because of your faith in Christ and nothing more, God imputes or places Christ’s righteousness to your account and declares you righteous, establishing eternal peace between God and you! In verse 2 you are standing in God’s grace and exult in the hope of God’s coming glory! And then, in case you think your life will be a cake walk, Paul brings in tribulations. We also exult in tribulations, literally “thlipeses” – pressures, like a pressure cooker way of living. Paul describes tribulations in 2 Corinthians 4:8, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.” Put another way, we are squeezed, but not squashed.

We exult in all the pressure God brings into our lives to build up our faith muscles so we will what? Do you see the trail marker word? Endure! Persevere! You won’t become strong lying in bed all day! God brings stuff, people and weird circumstances, yes, weird people into our lives, so we learn to hang in there joyfully and let God do what He wants to do without our jumping out of the pressure cooker and running away. Hang in there. Endure. Your endurance will produce godly character (verse 4), which produces unashamed hope (verse 5). Why? Because God’s love has captured and flooded your heart by the Holy Spirit.

STOP #3 - James 1:2-4, *2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* You knew we’d go here. James calls us to unmixed joy as we deal with that new person at work who thinks she knows how to do your job and isn’t afraid to let you know it. She is a various – poikilois - trial. To unmixed joy when that boss tears you to shreds for you hardly know what. All joy means unmixed joy, free of whining and complaining and talking bad about God and other people. How many of us deserve to have our spiritual mouths washed out with soap as we gripe and complain about all kinds of things God in His good providence has placed in our lives? “Man, what a raw deal! I don’t deserve this! I’m not putting up with it! I am so out of here!”

No, “consider” means you are looking past the face of the trial to the loving sovereign hand of God behind it. “God is doing something here and I want to grow. Give me the patience to bear this thing with joy, with unmixed joy!” How many of us do that? Probably not one. But that’s what God is calling us to as we encounter trials of every kind.

STOP #4 - Hebrews 12:1-3, 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

That “cloud of witnesses” isn’t all the people in heaven watching you run your race. No, they ran their race and we need to remember it and be spurred on in our race. Every one of the faith heroes in Hebrews 11 faced trials and endured them. Some were delivered from their trials. Others suffered severely – torture, the sword, even sawn in two, but they endured and their faith was approved by God.

So what does God call you and me to do? Regardless of your trials, run the race with endurance! Don’t quit. Don’t grow weary or lose heart and check out. You need endurance to run a race! I have no idea how some of you people run those marathons. I can hardly get around our one mile subdivision. But do you see our key word? “Endurance!” Hanging in there no matter how tough it gets. And not just hanging in there, but doing so with joy! How? Fix your eyes, rivet your eyes on Jesus, our complete Savior from beginning to end. How did He run His race? Two words: joy and endured. Joyfully enduring!

God also tells us in verse five two ways not to handle trials. First, don’t regard them lightly or ignore them. “I don’t care if I do get an F on this test.” You can run away from God’s trials, but God wants you to build up the muscles of your faith and knows how to bring even bigger trials, heavier ones. A wise person is a learner under the trials God brings!

The second wrong way in verse five is to grow weary or give up. “I can’t handle this anymore. I quit!” But God doesn’t let His children quit either. He is our loving heavenly Father and every loving father disciplines his children for their good. Sometimes he spans and sometimes he commands or urges us onward. God loves you so much He’ll send some hard times for your good so you will grow and become more like His Son. You’ll share in His holiness. Run with endurance, just like Jesus did!

Joyful Ways of Thinking

So how do you develop joyful endurance when life seems to be not only squeezing you, but nearly squashing you? “These kids are driving me crazy. I don’t know if I can take any more!” “You don’t know what it’s like living with him!” “This is so hard!” God knows. But God wants us to face our trials with a joyful attitude. Here are four ways of thinking to help us.

First, you know that God is in this trial. This didn’t just happen. Romans 8:28 says we know God is our loving, kind, and good God who is sovereign over all the details of our lives, and therefore he causes all things, good things and bad things, to work together for our good, and that good is for us to become like Jesus Christ. One of the most comforting truths of the Christian life is to know that God is behind every single circumstance in our lives to correct us and to change us more and more into the likeness of His Son.

Second, God knows you need this trial. You know God loves you and is committed to your good and wants your best, and His loving plan right now is exactly where you find yourself. It may be a financial hardship or a health issue or a wayward child. Any of these can really change your life, and God’s intention is to have you change to more Christ-like. That one dive into the Chesapeake Bay in 1967 forever changed the life of Joni Eareckson Tada. Somehow God knew that trial would bring Joni to place of Christ-likeness and service to others. For years she has had a ministry to untold thousands of people in wheelchairs, as well as being a huge encourager to all who have heard her testimony.

Third, you know God will provide everything you need to handle this trial. Not easy. Joni hasn’t had an easy day in her life since that dive as a 17 year-old teenager. It stretched her almost to the breaking point, but her Savior’s words are true, “My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in your weakness.” Not easy, but sufficient.

Fourth, you know God is preparing you for the future. Who knows how God is using today's difficulty to prepare you for tomorrow's ministry? He has plotted out your course; your times are in His hands.

We will close the loop of the Trial Trail and head back to 1 Peter 1:8-9. I love this.

As God grows your faith through trials, you will see more and more of Christ by faith!

1 Peter 1:8-9 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

You will suffer some distressing trials and even though you have never seen Christ in the past and you certainly don't see Him now, you will see Him in the future. And as God builds your faith, proves and purifies your faith, Christ becomes more real. Ask yourself these questions as you go through God's trials for your good.

- **LOVE** - Are your trials deepening your **love** for Christ? Peter ought to know. "Do you love me Peter?" "Lord, you know that I love you!"
- **TRUST** - Are your trials strengthening your **trust** and confidence in Christ and His promises? Powlison says our trials ought to result in our clinging to Christ more firmly.
- **JOY** - Are your trials feeding your **joy** in Christ? You rejoice in Him more and more! Here we are, back to greatly rejoicing! We Christians are the only people on the planet who really have reason for greatly rejoicing, regardless of what comes our way. At times you can't even express your joy because it's so deep and real and filled with glory. Filled with glory? What does that mean? The glory of God shines from your heart. You are walking through this life with God's power accompanying you every step of the way, and your joy is glory-filled. It's not earth-filled or world-filled or flesh-filled or sin-filled. It's glory-filled. That's what you see shining on the faces of God's people – glory-filled joy! It is different from anything else in this world.
- **HOPE** - Are your trials brightening your **hope** in Christ's return? What's the end, the outcome, the goal of your faith? Whether you live to be 31 or 91, God will gather you to His Son and you will enjoy all eternity in pure, unadulterated joy, finally conformed to the very image of Jesus Christ!

This video clip by Joni Eareckson Tada was played as the conclusion of this message - <https://youtu.be/VVXJ8GyLgt0>

SO WHAT?

Your faith is under fire, but God is controlling the fire! How are you responding to the people and circumstances in your life – even the distressing ones? Are you rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory? If you're like me, you struggle here. Lord, help us to feed on Your grace and power so we can grow through Your trials to become more and more like Your Son, our Savior, who loved us and with joy endured that cross set before Him to bring all His people to God.