



There is no way to avoid difficulties in life. Multiple challenges come at us from different directions, sometimes all at once. *How will we make it through this semester of nursing school? The next exam? How will we get through the next shift of complex patients and difficult work interactions? How will we survive a painful situation or relationship? **How will we endure the unendurable?***

Endurance has been defined as the ability to keep doing something for a long time that is hard, painful, and unpleasant (Cambridge Dictionary online, 2023). Like a sweaty, breathless runner agonizing up the last hill of a long run or a bleary-eyed student pulling an “all-nighter” yet again to study for a test or finish a paper. Or the patient whose pain is “over a 10,” gritting her teeth as she waits for medication to ease her suffering.

What comes to mind when you think of endurance? Do “long time” and “painful” make you think of *strength*, or of *hanging on by a thread*?

The Bible has a lot to say about endurance. Scripture speaks openly of painful trials and tests that happen in life. The trials are almost always unexpected, and insidiously creep in or come swiftly and cruelly. Sometimes trials last a long time (like 430 years! See [Exodus 12:40](#)). Yet we find numerous accounts in the Bible of men and women who endured great difficulty and **even found joy during trials.***

This four-part Bible study explores *endurance* and how God wants to help us in our trials and in fact, show us how he is with us. This offers a beginning place to discover God’s strength, explore God’s purposes in trials, and investigate Jesus’ offer to *work with him and find rest*.

Ancient Old Testament writers used the image of a stately, majestic tree to describe the *person who seeks God.** Like a colossal, elegant tree, such a person matures spiritually and flourishes, developing deep roots and producing fruit no matter what happens. Indeed, they discover **how to endure the unendurable!**

The Lord blesses people who trust in him. They know that the Lord will help them. They will be like trees that grow beside a river. Their roots reach into the water. When the sun is hot, they are not afraid. Their leaves continue to be green. They give fruit each year, even when there is no rain. – Jeremiah 17:7-8

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*See study Closing for Bible references about stories of hardship, people who endured trials, and stately trees

STUDY 1

ENDURING THE UNENDURABLE

COLOSSIANS 1:10B-12* (*The Message*)

As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do *your* work. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is **strength that endures the unendurable** and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.

BACKGROUND

Around A.D. 62, the apostle Paul spoke of endurance in a letter to a budding church at Colossae in Asia Minor (now Turkey). In the Greco-Roman world people believed various gods and rituals protected from evil spirits and gave success. The Colossian church was under attack from this outside pagan culture and from within by false teaching promoting rites and taboos for spiritual protection *instead of Jesus* (i.e., [chapter 2](#)). In a bold countercultural move, Paul declares **Jesus Christ is the supreme power over all things**, visible and invisible. Jesus secured redemption for all through his death and resurrection; defeated the powers of darkness; and invites believers to live powerful spirit-filled lives with him. Paul's point isn't "just try a little harder." He illuminates an amazing truth: Christ-followers share in Jesus' power and authority. As we get to know God and grow in the wisdom and understanding that comes from God, we receive **God's glory-strength**. In prison for sharing the gospel, Paul even states, "I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am" ([Philippians 4:13](#)).



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DIG DEEPER

- What is the first step in beginning to learn how God works? Have you taken that step?*
- Paul described aspects of God's "glory-strength" in other letters he wrote. He said Christ's strength worked best through his weaknesses ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)), that he could do everything through Jesus who gives strength ([Philippians 4:12-13](#)), and that Jesus stands at his side. What grabs your attention about God's strength from these verses?
- What three things does Paul pray for the [Colossians in 1:9](#): "Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you, asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works." How are these three things related to God's glory-strength? How do we obtain them?

* We discover God through a personal relationship with Jesus, God's Son. Do you have this relationship? Do you want to know about relationship with God? Ask God to help you learn more about him. Contact NCF@InterVarsity.org if you would like help exploring relationship with God.

LIFE APPLICATION

- Where in your life are you enduring the unendurable? If you were to talk to Jesus about this, how do you think he would respond? Tell Jesus your situation and what you are experiencing. Ask him to help you. Use the *Welcome Prayer* if desired.
- Where have you witnessed God's glory-strength in yourself or another person or situation? What happened? Why did you think it was God's glory-strength?

WELCOME PRAYER

Sit in a comfortable position and breathe slowly. Scan your body from the top of your head to your toes. Where do you feel tightness or pain? As you name that place, say, "Welcome, Jesus, welcome," and let any tension go. Breathe deeply. Release. Tell Jesus you need help from him. Name your issues and say, "Welcome, Jesus, welcome."

* adapted from *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Calhoun (2015, IVP Press)

STUDY 2

SHOOT ADRENALINE INTO YOUR SOUL

HEBREWS 12:2-3* (*The Message*)

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. **Study how he did it.** Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

BACKGROUND

- The unknown writer of the letter to the Hebrews (around A.D. 70) magnificently explains the superiority of Jesus Christ—over angels and the priests and covenants of the Old Testament. The author calls Christ-followers to persevere and hold on by faith to the true salvation and rest found in Christ. ***The key to successful endurance is keeping our eyes on Jesus.*** Jesus is our supreme example for living life and our source for stamina in life.
- After Jesus was resurrected and before he went back to heaven, he declared he had ***all*** authority over heaven and earth, that he would ***always*** be with his followers ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)), and that the Holy Spirit would teach believers ***all*** things ([John 14:26](#)) and guide his followers into ***all*** spiritual truth ([John 16:13-15](#)). Jesus has ***“been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—***all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help” ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#), *The Message*).

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DIG DEEPER

- What is the story of Jesus we are to explore again and again? Go through the main points of his life in your mind and jot down in a journal. (Skim Matthew's gospel for help.)
- What did Jesus endure? What was the outcome?
- How do we "keep our eyes on Jesus?" How can we "study how he did it"—how Jesus ran the race of faith? (See for example, see [Matthew 26](#). What did Jesus do right before his arrest and crucifixion?)

LIFE APPLICATION

- Where or in what ways do you need to "keep your eyes on Jesus?" What would that look like in your daily life?
- Jesus said in [Matthew 28:18-20](#) that he had **all** power, would **always** be with his followers, and that the Holy Spirit would teach **all** we need to know spiritually.
 - Where do you need Jesus to be with you?
 - Where do you need his power to endure?
 - What do you want to learn from the Holy Spirit?

Ask Jesus for these things; use the *Prayer for Help* if desired.

- What plans will you make to spend time with Jesus this week? How will you study the Bible? Spend time in prayer? Worship Jesus?*

* To help you get started, see the free resources NCF offers on the Closing page.

PRAYER FOR HELP

Dear Jesus, you know what it was like to be in impossible circumstances. You say in the Bible we can walk right up to you and ask for help. Will you help me now? Will you lead me through this difficult situation? Show me the next steps—in the Bible, from people who know you well, and in my circumstances. Thank you, Jesus, for your mercy. Amen.



PART 2

Lined writing area for notes.

Photo Credit: Andrea Piacquadio / Pexels



STUDY 3

DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

JAMES 1: 2-4,* (*The Message*)

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that **under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open** and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way. **If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father.** He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought.

BACKGROUND

- James, the author of the book that bears his name, was a younger brother of Jesus ([Matthew 13:55](#)). James was an early leader of the first century Jerusalem church that started on the Day of Pentecost (a Jewish festival celebrated 50 days after Passover) in the year Jesus died and was resurrected (AD 32-33). On that day, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, Peter preached a powerful sermon, and *3000 people confessed faith in Jesus* and were baptized ([Acts 2:1-41](#)). Revival continued as the wildly successful church grew *daily* through great teaching, healing miracles, fantastic answers to prayer, and the sharing of food and possessions. Sadly, persecution broke out around AD 36 with the stoning of Stephen, another church leader. All the believers except the apostles left Jerusalem ([Acts 8:1-3](#)).
- James wrote his letter around AD 45-50 to the scattered church members who were suffering persecution and poverty just for being Christians. Interestingly, he opens saying **be happy when you're engulfed in these hard trials.**
- Writings from antiquity suggest James was stoned to death around AD 62.

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DIG DEEPER

- Nurses are familiar with clinical trials, drug trials, and treatment trials to test if something will help a patient. What are the different purposes of these trials?
- Jesus spoke of persecution (one type of trial) that would come because of commitment to God, explaining that problems drive us deeper into God's kingdom ([Matthew 5:3-12](#)). He said "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule" (verse 5). How do trials lead to "less of you and more of God?"
- What were Jesus and James trying to teach Christ-followers about why trials occur in our lives?

LIFE APPLICATION

- Have you ever tried to get out of trials "prematurely," perhaps running from a situation or making a hasty decision? What happened? What does James suggest we do?
- Can you identify ways past trials have built endurance in you and/or grown your faith (or you witnessed endurance and faith in someone else)? How did you or they *not give up*?
- When you don't know what you're doing, what do you typically do? James says God loves to help. Ask God to help now. If desired, use the *Prayer for Wisdom*.

PRAYER FOR WISDOM

Dear God, you know the situation I am in. You said you love to help us and will give us your wisdom. God, will you start showing me what you want to do? Help me to not be afraid or run in the wrong direction. Help me learn new things. Give me patience to wait as you work things out the way you want. Build my faith and trust in you. Thank you, God, for loving me so much. Amen.



PART 3

Lined writing area for notes, enclosed in a red border.



STUDY 4

COME TO ME

MATTHEW 11:28-30* (*The Message*)

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? **Come to me.** Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. **Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.** Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

BACKGROUND

- Matthew, a tax collector who became one of Jesus’ 12 disciples ([Matthew 9:9](#)), wrote a compelling narrative about the long-anticipated Messiah. In his gospel, Matthew recorded many of Jesus’ messages and showed how Jesus—Son of David, Son of God, Son of Man—brought God’s kingdom to earth.
- In [Matthew 11](#) Jesus issues a life-changing invitation: **Come to me.** If you’re struggling and weary—enter relationship with me. He further asserts, “I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.” Other Bible translations use the term yoke here—a frame joining two animals together to pull heavy loads. The people of the day felt a heavy yoke from their religious leaders. They felt burdened with trying to keep way too many complicated rules that made it impossible to please God. Jesus was offering a totally different way to be in relationship with God.

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DIG DEEPER

- Jesus was always inviting people to come to him. In [John 7:37-39](#) he said, “If anyone thirsts, let him **come to me** and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way....” (Also see [John 4:10-13](#))
 - What does Jesus mean by “Come to me?”
 - What are you thirsty for? Tell Jesus what you long for in life.
 - What is “living water?”*
- How do we do walk with, work with, and watch Jesus?
- If grace is *God’s undeserved favor*, what do you think Jesus meant by “unforced rhythms of grace?”

* NCF offers free Bible studies, prayer times, and events that can help you drink Jesus’ living water. See Resources on the Closing page.

LIFE APPLICATION

- A few years ago, a dramatic *horse pull* competition—where two harnessed draft horses pull thousands of pounds of dead weight—revealed an incredible spiritual truth about being yoked to Jesus. A slightly smaller horse, straining against the heavy weight, stumbled, and started to go down. The crowd gasped then watched the larger partner horse stay strong and push forward. The smaller horse regained his footing. Then he stumbled again, and again the partner carried the load. What an incredible image of being in relationship with Jesus—the strong One who is always with us and wants to help us.
- Where are you carrying a heavy load? Talk to Jesus about your load. Be open with him, knowing he cares for you. As you bring your concerns, pray scriptures reminding you of how God helps us. Here are sample verses: [Psalm 55:22](#), [Isaiah 40:28-31](#), [1 Peter 5:7](#). Use the *Prayer for Rest* if desired.

PRAYER FOR REST

Dear Jesus, I need your help. No matter what I do, things are not coming together in this (name situation). I am tired. You promise you won’t lay anything heavy or that doesn’t fit on me. I need your perspective. I need to stop trying to do things without you and in my own strength. Help me understand what it means to trust you and experience you carrying this load by my side. Help me to know your rest. Show me the next steps. Thank you for walking with me. Amen





HEBREWS 5:7-10 (*The Message*)

While he lived on earth, anticipating death, Jesus cried out in pain and wept in sorrow as he offered up priestly prayers to God. Because he honored God, God answered him. Though he was God's Son, **he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do.** Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest...he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believingly obey him.

ENDURANCE THROUGH TRIALS

- Something great about the Bible is we can read **what happened through the trials of God's people.** We get glimpses of how God works in terrible circumstances. We learn that the jealousy of Joseph's brothers led to God's plan to save the world from famine ([Genesis 50:19](#)); that Moses' rejection by the Israelites led to 40 years of preparation to take on Pharaoh and free God's people ([Acts 7:30-36](#)). We unearth things like a severe famine in Bethlehem and deaths of a man and his sons who went to Moab to survive, leading to the marriage of Ruth and Boaz—the great grandfather of King David (see book of [Ruth](#)). We meet **Jesus, who suffered more than anyone and saved the world** ([1 Peter 2:21-25](#)). We find the persecution of the Jerusalem church led to the spreading of the gospel "all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world" ([Acts 1:8](#)). We realize **God is faithful to those who seek him**; that he establishes his people like majestic, ever-enduring trees.
- The Scripture passages on the next page relay stories of ordinary people who persevered through hard, painful and unpleasant trials. They found the ability to keep going, some for a long time, **in order to obey God.** They did what they thought God wanted them to do, and they trusted him. We witness God's faithfulness as we see what he accomplishes through trials. Dig into the passages and ask Jesus to guide you in the process of learning trusting-obedience, endurance, and confidence that he is faithfully working in and through your life.

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STORIES OF HARDSHIP AND ENDURANCE			
Person	Where in the Bible?	What they did:	The Outcome:
Noah	<u>Genesis 6-8</u> <u>Hebrews 11:7</u>	Obedied God in a wicked world; built the ark	Saved his family and all living creatures
Abraham	<u>Genesis 11-25</u> <u>Acts 7:2-8</u> <u>Hebrews 11:8-19</u>	Left his country to become a nomad; died with no inheritance	Became the father of God's people
Joseph	<u>Genesis 37-50</u> <u>Acts 7:9-18</u>	Faithful to God through years of unjust enslavement	Saved the world from famine
Moses	<u>Book of Exodus</u> <u>Acts 7:17-36</u> <u>Hebrews 11:23-29</u>	Left Egyptian royal family to identify with Israeli slaves; was rejected by his people	Delivered Israel from 430 years of slavery; led people to a new land
David	<u>1 Samuel 16-31</u> ; <u>2 Samuel</u> <u>Acts 13:22-23</u>	Shepherd boy who killed the Philistine giant Goliath; suffered unjust harassment by King Saul for many years	Became a great warrior, ancestor of Jesus, Israel's greatest king until Jesus
Daniel	<u>Daniel 1-12</u>	Taken at young age from Judah into captivity in Babylon; persecuted for following God	Gained high position in Babylon; advised five kings; became God's prophet
Peter	<u>Matthew 4:18-20</u> <u>Matthew 16:13-19</u> <u>Acts 1-12</u>	Left fishing business to follow Jesus; became close disciple; was persecuted, imprisoned; crucified upside down according to ancient writings	Led disciples after Jesus ascended; started / led the church; took gospel to Israel; wrote two New Testament books
Paul	<u>Acts 13-28</u> ; (see <u>8:1-3</u>) <u>2 Corinthians 11:16-33</u> <u>Philippians 3:4-11</u>	Jewish leader (Pharisee) who believed in and preached Jesus; heavily persecuted; imprisoned last years of his life; martyred	Took good news of Jesus to the world; wrote majority of New Testament

HELP FROM NCF



STATELY TREES	
Tree of knowledge	<u>Genesis 2:8-9</u> ; <u>17</u>
Tree of life	<u>Genesis 2:8-9</u> ; <u>Revelation 2:7</u> ; <u>22:2</u> , <u>14</u>
Godly wisdom	<u>Proverbs 3:13-18</u>
Godly people as:	Firmly planted trees <u>Psalms 1:1-3</u> ; <u>Jeremiah 17:7-8</u>
	Flourishing trees <u>Psalms 52:8</u> ; <u>92:12</u>
	Fruitful trees <u>Proverbs 11:30</u>
Mustard tree	<u>Matthew 13:31-32</u>