

## Never Give Up!

by Ray C. Stedman

We are drawing now to a close in these studies in this great epistle of Christian life and liberty. The author of this letter has reviewed the exciting facts about Christian faith, and now, in this twelfth chapter, he comes to the practical exhortations that follow the presentation he has made. What he has to say is, "Never give up!" "You have started right," he says, "now hang on, never give up." It is all summarized in one verse. He says to these Christians then, and to us now,

**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. {Heb 12:3 RSV}**

That is the problem, is it not? Our tendency is to grow weary and to be fainthearted and slack off. To get disinterested and live from day to day without much concern whether we are running the race of faith well or not. This is the problem they had, and it is the problem we face.

This chapter stresses one great fact: The Christian life was never intended to be a picnic. It is bound to be rough, he says, for it was rough for the Lord Jesus. "Consider him," he says, "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." If you think it is hard living with the neighbors you live with, or working for the boss you work for, or living with the mother-in-law you have to put up with, I suggest you review again the conditions our Lord faced in his earthly ministry. He had constantly to endure the stubbornness of men, the recalcitrant, obdurate attitude with which they refused to believe what he said. It was true even of his own disciples. How many times he had to rebuke them for being small in faith and even for putting stumbling blocks in the path of those who

tried to come to him. Again and again he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.

Now that is what the Christian life will be like, and we need to face it. Our Lord had to endure it clear to the end. It was he who reminded us that the servant is not greater than his master. If the world persecuted him, it will persecute us, and if it kept his word, it will keep our word as well. As Frances Ridley Havergal has reminded us,

God has not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our life through.

The rest of the chapter enlarges upon this fact that the Christian life will include times of hardship and trials.

In this chapter there are three reasons why these difficulties, disappointments and heartbreaks must come to us:

- First, trials manifest to us the discipline of love.
- Second, they allow opportunity for the demonstration of adequacy.
- Third, they expose to us the demarcation of truth.

First there is a passage on **the discipline of love:**

**In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? –**

**“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor lose courage when you are punished  
by him.**

**For the Lord disciplines him whom he  
loves,  
and chastises every son whom he re-  
ceives.”**

**It is for discipline that you have to endure.  
God is treating you as sons; for what son is  
there whom his father does not discipline?  
If you are left without discipline, in which  
all have participated, then you are illegiti-  
mate children and not sons. {Heb 12:4-8  
RSV}**

To these harassed, persecuted Christians, tempted as we often are with discouragement, the writer says, “Do not look at the dark side, look at the bright side; there is something good about discipline.”

1. First of all, it could be worse! That is always encouraging, is it not? He reminds them, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood; God has spared you what others have had to face. You should be grateful for that for even the Son of God was not spared this. Romans 8:32 reminds us, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” Though we may have it rough, it has not been as rough as it could have been. The future may yet call for more strength on our part.

When Jeremiah began to complain to the Lord about his problems, the Lord said to him, “If you have been running with the footmen and you find it difficult, what are you going to do when you compete with horses? And if you fall down when you are in a safe land, what will you do in the day of the swelling of Jordan?” {cf, Jer 12:5}. So God reminds us that even though trials come, they could be worse.

2. Second, hardships prove our sonship. Every boy knows that his father does not discipline the neighbor children, he disciplines you! The reason is because you are his son. God does not discipline the children of darkness either, he disciplines his own. Therefore, if we have discipline, if we are going through struggles and

problems, then thank God. Even with our earthly fathers, he points out, we gave them respect during times of discipline.

**Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. {Heb 12:9-10 RSV}**

“At their pleasure” does not mean that fathers whip their children in order to amuse themselves, it means they did what they thought was right, though sometimes they were wrong. Every young person can say “Amen” to that! But God is never wrong. What he does is right. What he sends is exactly what we need, he is never wrong. God loves us and he sends exactly what we need, that is the argument here.

We have often reminded you of this definition of a Christian: One who is

Completely fearless,  
Continually cheerful, and  
Constantly in trouble.

This is exactly what this passage describes. God does not ask us to rejoice in the trouble, but in what the trouble does for us. He is not expecting us to screw a smile on our face and go around saying, “Hallelujah, it hurts!” No, as the writer says, “for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.” But God is asking us to rejoice, nevertheless, not saying, “Hallelujah, it hurts,” but “Hallelujah, it helps!” For, he points out, “later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Notice that last part. It is possible to go through trials and never have them do a thing for you because you complain all the time. Trials never do anything for you if you are always grouching and griping.

Surely it is difficult to believe that God sends these things, yet the whole of Scripture is to this point. Perhaps you say Satan sends them. No, God sends them, using Satan, perhaps, but you have never looked far enough if

you look only at the immediate instrument. You must lift your eyes to the One behind it all and see that God sends these things. Therefore they come for our blessing and we are to rejoice in that.

Once in a while in my reading I run across a passage that is so well put, so beautifully expressed, that it defies assimilation and I simply must quote it. I ran across such a passage in *Decision Magazine*. It was an editorial entitled, "Hang Tough." It so captures the thought of this passage we are studying that I share it with you:

So! Things are becoming a little rough and you want to quit. The pressure is too great, you say. No one appreciates your effort to spread the Gospel. The government has closed down your missionary bookstore, your hospital. Some religious bigot is inciting people to try to break up your meetings. People in the office are complaining about your Christian witness; they say your "halo fits too tight." Neighbors are beginning to look upon you as a nuisance. Someone wrote a letter in which he implied that your ideas were fanatical. Your family says you are old-fashioned and should stop "forever going to that church."

So now you are ready to pull out, to cave in, to switch to something else. Enough is enough, you say.

We, of course, do not know your circumstances, but we are going to throw away all the psychology books and offer a suggestion anyway. It is a rather crude Western expression: *hang tough* – like a ranch hand riding a steer. In the common coinage: don't give up!

Things are going to be better for you. We know they will! Not because "tomorrow is another day" or anything like that, but because God has promised it to his children. Read the promise in Isaiah 54:7-8. It may seem that it was written just for you. God never promised his children that dark days would not come; he promised that fulfillment would follow. Just as the angels came and ministered to our Lord after the temptation, so God will send his blessings to you. He will give you – himself.

Someday we believe you will see that the things you are now going through

were necessary, in God's wisdom, to prepare you for what he has in store for you. You thought it was an attack on your integrity; God will give you a meaningful growth experience out of it. You do not have to try to make sense of life every minute, for God has already made sense of it.

How foolish, then, to "throw in the towel" right now. Did you imagine that the Christian life was to be all "golden slippers in the golden streets"? What do you imagine the Bible is talking about when it speaks of "overcomers"? You say you want "out" – why? No courage? Are you afraid to face life?

It may be that you will have to look squarely at certain things. As a parent, as a young person, as a church worker, as a human being, you have deliberately avoided a certain matter, taking the easy way out. All right, then, gird up your loins and go after it. The way to face the music is to face it! Don't stand there wilting and telling people you "can't take the pressure." Let God take it for you! That is why he is God. He is our strength and shield, the Bible says – a very present help in trouble.

Remember, there is no such thing as weak-kneed Christianity. Christ builds strong knees – through prayer. You say you have had to take one setback after another; that at times it seems hidden forces are ranged against you; that life has played you a "dirty trick." But why should any of these things keep you from bobbing back? Look who is in front of you! "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19).

The Gospel has other words for other days, but the word today is, stay in there. Persevere. Show your mettle. "Hang tough." Strike a blow for Jesus Christ in spite of everything. For if you give in now, you may lose far more than you realize. But if you stick with it – and with God – there is everything to gain.

Now let us look at the second reason why trials come. They provide **an opportunity to demonstrate our adequacy in Christ:**

**Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. {Heb 12:12-17 RSV}**

Here the writer summarizes the practical results of trials in our life: They make possible the demonstration of a new kind of living, which is what the world is looking for. The world is not at all impressed with Christians who stop doing something the world is doing. But they are tremendously impressed with Christians who have started living the kind of a life the worldling cannot live. That stops them! And that is the life he is setting before us here.

First it starts with correction. “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet.” That is, if you keep on going the way you are going it will only get worse – that which is lame will be put out of joint. But stop it, he says, strengthen these things. Stop being so weak, stop being so anxious, so worried. How will the world get the impression that Christ is victor if they look at you and you are always in defeat? Strengthen these things, he says, and learn how to live in peace with your neighbor, “strive for peace with all men.” And above all, “follow after or seek after that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

There is a verse that has bothered many. What does it mean? Do not forget that holiness is the exact Greek word that is also translated in this letter *sanctification*. We saw before that *sanctify* means “to put to its proper use.” When a man or a woman is believing that Christ indwells him and gives him everything he needs for every minute, he is being “put to the proper use,” the use for which God intended man. This is holiness, this sense of dependence and availability to God. This is what

makes the world sit up and take notice as they see Christian men and women living the kind of life that is always adequate for every circumstance. That is the holiness without which no man can see the Lord.

The second phrase has to do with our concern for others: “See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God.” We are not to live our lives to ourselves. Others are looking to us and we have a responsibility to them. He points out the two things that will stop the grace of God in any man’s life – bitterness and flippancy.

“Do not let a root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble.” Bitterness is always wrong. No matter how justified the cause of bitterness may be, to have a bitter attitude as a Christian is always wrong, for resentment, envy, and bitterness are always of the flesh. The trouble is, they are highly contagious diseases. If one person is bitter and continues in an unforgiving, bitter spirit, others are infected by this and it spreads and defiles many. This is the problem in many a church today. So, if you see someone around you that has this problem, help him to see that this is a terrible thing that will wreck his life and destroy the grace of God, thus making it impossible to grow as a Christian.

The other thing that will arrest grace is flippancy, taking the things of the Spirit lightly as Esau did. He is the great example of this. Remember how Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage? He came in from the field hungry and saw Jacob cooking a mess of red lentils. When Esau saw the red lentils in the pot, he said to Jacob, “Give that red to this red” (pointing to his own red beard). That is one of the few puns recorded in Scripture. By that act he lost his birthright, not because he was an atrocious punster, but because he took the things of the Spirit lightly. The birthright had to do with the promise given to Abraham concerning the coming of a Seed that would set men free from self. To despise it, as Esau did, is to say that the things that God offers to do for man are of no importance at all.

There is many a Christian, many a young person, who is in danger of despising his birthright, as Esau did, by saying “I haven’t time for these things, I’m too busy. I haven’t time to concern myself with studying the Scriptures, or walking with God.” Unfortunately this causes a terrible reaction. As in the case of Esau, a hardness of heart sets in and when the moment of truth dawns it may be too

late. When it says here, “he desired to inherit the blessing later but was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears,” please do not misunderstand that. That does not mean that he tried to repent in his own heart but could not. The repentance he sought was not his own, but his father’s. Repentance means a change of mind. When he came back to his father later and said, “Now, Father, I’d like to have my birthright,” his father said, “It’s too late, son. You sold it for a mess of pottage and it belongs to your brother.” Esau wept bitterly and tried to change his father’s mind, but his father could not change his mind; it was too late.

Here, then, is the ministry we are to have:

- To have a life in ourselves that is characterized by a display of that holiness, that sanctification, that proper use of our humanity that makes God visible in us, and
- To manifest it in a deep concern for the welfare of others, that no one else miss the grace of God.

That is the ministry, but what is the motive? For that we must look at the next passage:

**For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. {Heb 12:18-24 RSV}**

There is the motive. How can we carry on a ministry like this that has just been described? Not by being driven by fear. Not by the Law with its demands upon us, “Do this, or else.” Not by self-

effort, not by the gritted teeth and the clenched fist and a determination that we are going to serve God. That will never do it, we have seen that throughout this letter. If we serve because we are afraid we will lose something from God, that frightens us as the Law frightened Israel in the terrible scene on Mt. Sinai. But it is not fear that is our motive; it is fullness, it is what God has given us.

You have come, he says, not to this Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion, the place of grace; “and to the new Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” This is another term for the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. You have come under a new government, under new management. “And to angels.” In the first of this letter we are told that angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are to be the heirs of salvation, i.e., Christians. Angels are here to help us when we need it. They are part of our resource. “And to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven.” This is the Church, those who are born in Christ, part of the Firstborn of God, sharing his life with our names written in heaven, i.e., the heavenly calling. “And to the universal judge, to God who is judge of all men,” whether they are Christians or not. All men are on the same basis because they stand alike before God.

“And to the spirits of just men made perfect.” Who are these? They are the Old Testament saints we read about in Chapter 11, men and women of God who lived in the days when the promise was given before the cross, who looked forward by faith and who are waiting now for us. And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, the new arrangement for living. A mediator is not someone up in heaven somewhere, in some distant reach of space; he is an indwelling Christ. That is the point this letter makes. He is available to us. He is right here to be our strength, our righteousness, our wisdom, whatever we need. “And to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.” When Abel’s blood was shed it cried out for vengeance, as the book of Genesis tells us, but Jesus’ blood did not speak of vengeance – it speaks of access, of vindication, of the fact there is no problem between man and God that is not settled by his blood. There is no longer any question of guilt. We can come completely accepted in the Beloved.

Thus, with all this on our side there is no need to fail, is there? That is the point he is making. Certainly it gets rough, certainly it gets discourag-

ing, surely there are times when the pressures are intense, but have you reckoned on your resources? Have you forgotten them?

I shall never forget a story of a Navajo Indian who periodically came off the reservation to see his banker. He was a rich old man, having made a lot of money in oil and it was all in the bank. But he would come to his banker, and say, “Money all gone. Sheep all dead. Cattle all stolen. Fences all down. Everything bad.” His banker knew exactly what to do. He would go into the vault, put a lot of money into some bags and set it down in front of the old man. He would count the money, and his eyes would begin to gleam. Then he would come to the banker again and say, “Sheep all well. Cattle all back. Fences all up. Everything good.” And out he would go. He was reckoning on his resources.

Now what he was counting on was a very flimsy security indeed, but the principle upon which he operated was right: He counted on that which was available to him. With the resources available to us, there is no reason to fail. With all this working for us, who can be against us?

Finally, these trials come to us to mark out truth, **the demarcation of truth:**

**See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. {Heb 12:25-29 RSV}**

This is the fifth and last great warning passage in this book, and it reminds us that these difficult times that we go through have a special purpose. Paul said in his letter to Timothy, “Perilous times will come in which men will be lovers of self, hateful, trucebreakers,” {cf, 2 Tim 3:1 ff} – and a long

list of ugly things. These “perilous times” come in cycles throughout history, and they have a designed purpose. They are God’s way of showing man what is passing and what is permanent. God is shaking the earth and the heaven. This is not the final great tribulation he is referring to, it is something going on right now. God is now shaking the earth and the heaven.

Have you noticed that the concepts on which man builds for security are being tested today as never before, and exposed as either true or false? Think of some of the things that men trust in:

- The security of number. We think if we can get enough people to join our club we will have strength. Today, alliances like that are collapsing on every side, agreements are merely scraps of paper, and no one can trust his associates very far.
- Then there is our trust in the power of organization itself. We think if we can get things systematically organized we can take care of all our problems. But now we are faced with the Frankensteinian monster of Big Government which is moving in to dominate more and more of life. It is well organized, but organization has run away with us and we are afraid of it now, with world government looming on the horizon. It frightens us, but it is simply a revelation of the weakness of our trust in the power of organization.
- Take the common idea today of “the goodness of man.” That was once heard on every side, but you do not hear it much any more. More and more, as men are being shaken by what God is doing in the world today we see violence increasing, and the indifference of man to his neighbor’s need is demonstrated even here in the United States where we thought we were so civilized and cultured.
- There is our trust in the omnipotence of money. The older we grow the more we are sure that if we could get enough money things would be all right. We are being taught today to pray, “Our Father which art in Washington...” The result is that we are seeing more emptiness and meaninglessness and vacuity in life than we

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have ever seen before. Money, as our Lord reminded us, is never enough. This idea is being shaken so man can see what will remain.

- Our trust in the wisdom of science is threatening now the very destruction of the world in which we live, the whole human race. Not only from the atom and hydrogen bombs, but from such things as pesticides and other ways we influence nature.

We are not smart enough to run our lives. That is what this passage makes clear.

Is it not rather revealing today that the most widespread description of our common reaction to life is, “We’re all shook up?” God is shaking the things that can be shaken in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

The word to the Christian is, “let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. For our God is a consuming fire.” God is light and God is love, and when you put those two together you get fire. Fire is both light and warmth. As someone has well pointed out, fire will destroy what it cannot purify, but it purifies what it cannot destroy. That is the whole explanation of life in this present hour. We are passing through the fire which is designed either to destroy that which can be destroyed, or to purify that which can never be destroyed.

God is leading us through these trials and through the difficulties of our day, in order that we may learn to cry with old Job, back there in the oldest book of the Bible, “He knoweth the way that I take, when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold,” {Job 23:10 KJV}.

James Russell Lowell reminds us of the same truth in these words:

Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet the truth alone is strong.  
Truth forever on the scaffold  
Wrong forever on the throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future  
And behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God behind the shadows  
Keeping watch above his own.

### Prayer:

Our Gracious Father, what a mighty revelation this is of the uncertainty of man’s reasonings and man’s abilities, but the sureness, the security that we have when we rest in that which can never be shaken. We are so grateful today, Lord, that by grace you have led us to this. We have tested it, we know it works. Now help us to stand strong, and “hang tough” and to be yours in every circumstance of life. We pray in thy name, Amen.

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