

Four Essentials to Finishing Well

by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges emphasizes the importance of daily communion with God, appropriation of the Gospel, and reliance on grace to finish the Christian race well.

Duration: 58:50

Scripture: Lamentations 3:37-38, Romans 8:38-39, Romans 12:1, Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 4:6, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Perseverance Of Faith", "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes four essentials for standing firm and enduring to the end based on 2 Timothy chapter 4. It highlights the importance of daily communion with God, daily appropriation of the Gospel, daily commitment to God as a living sacrifice, and a firm belief in the sovereignty and love of God. The speaker also stresses the need for perseverance, moving forward in faith despite obstacles.

Transcript

Well, good morning to you. It is indeed a privilege for me to be here, for Jane and myself to be here, and we have thoroughly enjoyed the time in the meeting last night and we look forward to this day. Would you turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 4. John gave each of us the freedom to develop this theme as the Lord would lead us and as I prayed over this and thought how I would approach it, I decided to speak this morning on four essentials for standing firm, or four essentials for enduring to the end, or four essentials for finishing well.

A lot of people just finish. We want to finish well. And so with that, let's turn our attention to the text, 2 Timothy chapter 4, beginning with verse 6. The Apostle Paul writes, For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Two men who had ministered together, Paul and Demas, mentor and mentoree, one endured and finished the race and looked forward to the crown of righteousness. The other man peeled off, deserted his mentor, and is never heard from again. We don't know what finally happened to Demas.

We don't know whether he ever repented or not, but the scripture ends with the fact that Demas has deserted me, being in love with this present world. In Philemon 24, Paul calls Demas a fellow worker, along with Mark and Aristarchus and Luke. Demas was apparently a promising young man with a promising future, yet as far as we know, he did not make it to the end.

This is a sobering thought, because many of you in the auditorium today are young. In God's gracious providence, you have many years ahead of you. And the temptation, or the issue, is will you finish the race, will you stand firm, will you endure, or will you be like Demas? This is a sobering thought even for me at the age of 77.

I might as well tell you that, being on staff for Navigators for 52 years. I didn't start when I was in kindergarten. But even at my age, it's a sobering thought, because as that great American philosopher Yogi Berra said, it ain't over till it's over.

So I cannot presume that even at my age, I will finish well. We never finish until the day we die. And so what I say to you today, I say to myself as well, and as we cover these four essentials for standing firm and enduring to the end, I speak to all of us, including myself.

Now these four essentials are viewed from our perspective. That is, these are things which we must and should do, or believe, but standing over all of them is the grace of God. The same apostle who said, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, also said in another context, but by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Paul attributed all of his endurance, all of his faithfulness to the grace of God. And so as we look at our responsibility today, I want you to keep in mind that we are unable to fulfill that responsibility only by the grace of God. Now the grace of God is often misunderstood.

I think one of the most common understandings of the grace of God came from a Campus Crusade staff member when I asked a group of them one day, if you were to go out on your campus and just randomly select students and ask the question, what do you understand the grace of God to be? One of the Crusade staff members said, they would say, grace is God's cutting me some slack. Grace is God's letting me get away with a few things. That's the furthest thought from the grace of God.

The grace of God comes to us through Jesus Christ, but the grace of God is more than just a God's kindness and benevolent feeling toward us. The grace of God is dynamic. The grace of God is God in action for our good.

When the Apostle Paul said, by the grace of God, I am what I am, he was speaking about the empowering of the Holy Spirit that God in his grace supplies to each of us as we seek to live for him. Please keep in mind, as we look at our responsibilities, that we carry out those responsibilities only by the grace of God. In the words of John Newton, who said, his grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

At the end of the day, when it's all said and done, we attribute our faithfulness to the grace of God. As we consider these four essentials, keep in mind that we practice them only by his grace. Now, the first essential I call a daily time, and the first three points are going to have the word daily.

The first one is a daily time of focused personal communion with God. Now, many of you are familiar with that old classic, practicing the presence of God, but what I'm talking about here is not just practicing the presence of God throughout the day, as important as that is. But the foundation of that has to be a time of focused personal communion with God, and it has to be daily.

Demas didn't just wake up one day and make a 90 degree turn. He was not headed toward the finish line and wake up one day and decide he was going to go that direction. That doesn't happen.

Demas drifted in this direction, and if you and I do not practice this daily focused time of communion with God, we will find ourselves drifting in the wrong direction. In my Navy days, before we had global positioning satellites, we used a sextant. It's an instrument that shoots the stars, as we said.

We used the sextant to get our navigational position each day, twice a day. At dawn and at dusk, we would shoot the stars and get a position. And invariably, after having done that, we had to make a minor course correction.

Now, obviously, if we didn't do that, not only daily, but in our case twice a day, we would soon find that we were way off course. And so you and I need that daily course correction. And we do this as we have this focused time on God.

Demas was in love with this present world. Paul said, Demas has deserted me, being in love with this present world. Now, all of us are in everyone, whether believer or unbeliever, everyone is in love with something.

Demas was in love with the present world. The Apostle John said, do not love the world. But we cannot just do not love the world and have a vacuum in our hearts.

In order to not love the world, we have to love God. And our time of daily focused communion with God is a time when that love of God and his love for us is refreshed in our hearts. Listen to the words of the psalmist.

In Psalm 63, 1, he says, Oh God, you are my God. Earnestly, I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

My flesh faints for you. It's in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Notice the intensity of those words.

Earnestly, I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you.

This is far more than just a daily Bible reading and going over a few prayer requests. We speak of our quiet time or the still hour or our morning devotions or something like that. And while I'm not negating those terms, I want us to keep in mind the fact that the purpose of that quiet time or that still hour is not just to read a chapter in the Bible and go over a few prayer requests, but it is a time of personal communion with God.

That is to say, it should be a time of personal communion with God. Now, obviously, we need a plan. We don't just open our Bible and point our finger at a passage of Scripture and say, well, this is my passage for today.

But communion with God is far, far more than a plan. Communion with God is meeting with Him. It is asking God to speak to us.

It is speaking to Him as we read His Word, as we interact with His Word in prayer, as we pray over what God is saying to us in His Word. Psalm 42, verses 1 and 2, says a similar thing. It says, as the deer pants for streams of water, so pants my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and meet with God? Or again, David, in Psalm 27, verse 4, when he said, One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His

temple. Now, the beauty of the Lord is not a physical beauty.

It's the beauty of His attributes. It's the beauty of the cross. It's the beauty of what He has done for us in Christ.

And the psalmist said, I just want to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. I want to have communion with God. This is what it's all about, dear friends.

All of these scriptures speak of an intense desire to have that personal communion with God. Now, it's helpful to have a plan. But the plan must direct you to God Himself.

Do we spend time with God, or do we just read a chapter in the Bible? Now, spending time with God certainly involves the reading of the chapter or three verses or three chapters or whatever it might be. But the object of that is to meet with God, to have God speak to us and to respond to Him. As I open my scripture each day, I ask God, I say, Lord, may I today spend time with You? Would You speak to me from Your Word? Would You encourage me? Would You teach me? Would You rebuke me if I need it? Lord, whatever You see that I need today, I come to spend time with You.

Then, as I begin to read the passage, I respond to God over what I'm reading. I pray back to Him, whatever is appropriate in that. If you go to the Psalms and read through the Psalms, you will notice that in most of the Psalms, the psalmist is either speaking to God or speaking about God.

In fact, I think that's all of them, really, if we talk about speaking about God. But most of them, he's speaking to God. Now, sometimes he's rejoicing and sometimes he's lamenting.

He says, for example, Oh God, why do You hide Your face from me? He is interacting with God. This is what we want to do. As we daily seek to have that personal communion with God, then God will give us that navigational fix, if you please.

He will show us what course corrections we need to make in our lives so that we do not drift off course as we will. So, if you and I are going to endure to the end, we must make it a practice, a discipline, if you please, but a practice to have that focused daily communion with God. The second essential is a daily appropriation of the Gospel.

Now, I put personal communion with God first to highlight its priority because that's the absolute basic. But in actual practice, I put my daily appropriation of the Gospel first. That is, I begin my time with God by reviewing and appropriating to myself the Gospel.

Now, the Gospel is only for sinners. And so I come to Christ as a still practicing sinner. In fact, I usually use the words of that tax collector in the temple when he cried out, Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Now, God has been merciful. And I'm quick to acknowledge his mercy in my life. But I say to him, I come in the attitude of that tax collector, I need your mercy.

I am still a practicing sinner. Even my very best deeds are sinful in your sight. And I am an object of your mercy and your grace.

Now, the reason that it's important that we come, first of all, by appropriating the Gospel is because it's through Christ that we have access to God the Father. Paul says in Ephesians 2.18, for through him, that is the Lord Jesus Christ, through him we both, Jew and Gentile, have access in one spirit to the Father.

We cannot come directly to God.

We must always come through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But God not only allows us to come, he invites us to come. The writer of Hebrews says, having therefore brother's confidence to enter into the most holy place, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

And so as we appropriate the Gospel, it gives us the confidence to come into the very presence of God, to have communion with him. We need to learn to live by the Gospel every day of our lives. In the early years of my Christian life and even in my Christian ministry, I regarded the Gospel as a message for the unbeliever.

Now that I was a Christian, I personally no longer needed the Gospel, except as a message to share with unbelievers. But I learned many years ago that I need the Gospel every day in my life. I need the Gospel to assure me of my righteous standing before God.

Consider Paul's words in Galatians 2.20. You might turn with me in your Bibles to that. Galatians 2.20. The Apostle Paul writes, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Now the context of this verse is the subject of justification. In verses 15, 16, and 17, the Apostle Paul speaks of our being justified four times.

He says, we're not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. And he keeps repeating that three or four times. And then in verse 21 he says, I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Clearly he is talking about the subject of justification. Now he's going to get to sanctification later, but that's not in this context. The reason I make a point of that is because I want to call your attention particularly to the last sentence of verse 20.

The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. The Apostle Paul is speaking about justification. Now this raises an apparent problem or question.

That is, justification we know to be a point in time, past event. That is, at the time you trusted Christ, you were at that precise moment declared righteous by God. You were justified.

That's why Paul in Romans chapter 5 can speak of justification in the past tense when he says, therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet here in this passage he speaks of it in the present tense. The life that I now live in the flesh.

Today, the life that I live today, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. So if justification is a point in time, event that happened in our past, why then does the Apostle Paul speak of it now in the present tense? Why is he speaking of justification in the present tense? The life that I now live today, I live by faith in the Son of God. The answer to that question is probably the most important thing that I will say this morning.

For the Apostle Paul, justification was not only a past event. It was also a present reality. This is where so many Christians miss it.

They can look back to the day that they trusted Christ and if you press them on that they will say, yes, I was justified at that time. But today, they seek to live their life as if it depended upon them. They have reverted to a performance relationship in their mind.

They have reverted to a performance relationship with God. And if I had my quiet time and if I haven't had any lustful thoughts and these kinds of things, then I expect God to bless me today. We want to pay our own way.

The Apostle Paul didn't do that. The Apostle Paul looked outside of himself and he saw himself clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He saw himself declared justified.

We say to a person who trusts Christ, you've been justified, you've been declared righteous, your sins have been forgiven. You stand before God today clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And then we can point to eternity.

And we can say when you go to be with the Lord, forever and ever you will stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Even though we will have left our sinful nature behind, even though we will be the righteous people made perfect, as the writer of Hebrews says, we will always for all eternity stand in the righteousness of Christ. That never changes.

But what about from the time of our conversion until the time we go to be with the Lord? For most Christians, it's a performance relationship. This is why we need a daily appropriation of the gospel because it is our nature to drift toward a performance relationship. Going back to those days of crossing the Pacific Ocean and getting those navigational positions twice a day.

If we did not get those, we would drift in the wrong direction. And if you do not daily appropriate the gospel, you will drift toward a performance relationship with God. And when you do that, you lead yourself in one of two directions.

If you have a very superficial view of sin in your life, that is, if you think of sin in terms of the big gross sins that society outside of us are committing, then you tend toward religious pride because you're not doing those things. If you're conscientious and if you're seeing some of these respectable sins such as gossip and pride and jealousy and envy and critical spirit and these kinds of things, if you're seeing those in your life and you do not have the gospel, then that leads you to despair. And so oftentimes people in this second category just kind of slack off because they can't handle the tension.

They can't handle the difference between what they know they should be and what they honestly see themselves to be. And that which resolves that tension is the gospel. To remind ourselves that we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

And that which keeps us from spiritual pride is the gospel because, again, the gospel is only for sinners. And so we are a bunch of sinners still practicing sinners. We've been delivered from the guilt and the dominion of sin.

Yes, that's true. And we are now called saints, separated ones, but we still sin in thought, word, deed, and most of all in motive because we often do the right thing for the wrong reason or for a mixed reason. We want to please God, but we want to look good in the process.

And so we come to the Lord and we say, Lord, I come still a practicing sinner, but I look to Jesus Christ in His shed blood and His perfect obedience, His righteous life, which has been credited to me. And I see myself standing before you clothed in His righteousness. That gets you out of bed in the morning.

That will get you excited about the Christian life when you see yourself daily clothed in His righteousness. And that will keep you from loving the world. You can't love the gospel and love the world at the same time.

That will keep you from loving the world. That will keep you from getting off course. About 100 years ago, a great theologian by the name of B.B. Warfield, who was a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote these words.

There is nothing in us or done by us at any stage of our earthly development because of which we are acceptable to God. That is, Warfield is saying there is nothing that we do in ourselves that makes us acceptable to God. He continues, we must always be accepted for Christ's sake or we cannot ever be accepted at all.

Then he continues. This is important. This is true of us not only when we believe, it is just as true of us after we have believed it will continue to be true as long as we live.

Our need of Christ does not cease with our believing nor does the nature of our relation to Him or to God through Him ever alter no matter what our attainments in Christian graces or our achievements in Christian behavior may be. In other words, he is saying it doesn't matter how sanctified we become. It doesn't matter how much we grow in the Christian life.

He says it is always on His blood and righteousness alone that we can rest. Dear friends, that's what it means to live by the Gospel. That's why we need to appropriate the Gospel every day in our lives because God only accepts us for Christ's sake.

God sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ and He wants us to see ourselves clothed in the righteousness of Christ so that we will come to Him on that basis and seek to relate to Him through the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ and not through our own works. All of us in our sinful nature are prone to slide toward a works relationship with God. And even though I have been preaching this kind of message for many, many years, I can tell you honestly it is so easy to revert in that direction because this is our sinful human nature.

It is our sinful human thinking that we must somehow earn God's favor by our own hard work, our own faithfulness. Now we want to be faithful. We want to work hard.

But not in order to earn God's approval, but because we have God's approval. And so a daily appropriation of the Gospel is essential to enduring to the end. The third essential is a daily commitment to God as a living sacrifice.

And for that I would direct our attention to Romans 12, verse 1. Romans 12, verse 1. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. As we daily reflect on the Gospel and what God has done for us in Christ, this should lead us to present ourselves as a daily living sacrifice. Now in using the word sacrifice, Paul was obviously drawing from the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Those sacrifices which are set forth for us in the book of Leviticus, and all of which together portray the one great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether or not Paul had in mind one of those sacrifices or not, there is one of those that I think best helps us to understand what Paul is saying when he says to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. And that is the burnt offering.

The reason that I say that the burnt offering helps us to understand what Paul is saying is because there were two things that were unique about the burnt offering. First of all, of all of the animal offerings, the burnt offering was the only one in which the entire animal was consumed upon the altar. The other portions were burned on the altar and the remaining portions were reserved for the priest or even in one case for the offerer and his family.

But the burnt offering, the entire animal was consumed upon the altar. And for that reason it was called the whole burnt offering. And it signified not only atonement for sin, but also consecration or dedication of the offerer to God.

And so the priest were to present a burnt offering twice a day in the morning and in the evening so that, in the words of the text, so that the fire would not go out upon the altar. In other words, there was always a burnt offering being consumed upon the altar. And so for that reason it was called a continual burnt offering.

So two descriptive terms, a whole burnt offering and a continual burnt offering. And I think that you can readily see the application that I want to draw from that. First of all, the whole burnt offering would signify that we are to consecrate our entire being.

Not only ourselves, but all that we have. Everything about us. We're to consecrate, we're to dedicate to God, to present to Him as a sacrifice.

And then the continual says to us that this must be repeated constantly. Because we have a tendency, just as we have a tendency to want to revert to a works relationship with God, we have a tendency to want to draw back that which we have committed to God. Or we might, you know, in a moment at a conference like this, sincerely, honestly say, Lord, I give my whole being, my body, my mind, my service, my money, everything about me, Lord, I consecrate it to You.

And then we go out and in a few weeks we're confronted with some issue. And we tend to draw back. And we realize that we're not as consecrated as we thought we were.

And this daily renewal of this consecration helps us to keep from doing that. The second word that's significant here in this passage is the word present. At least that's the word that's translated in the English Standard Version.

Paul says, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Now, whatever translation you might have and whatever word might be used, the idea is to give over to, to put at another's disposal. Some years ago, when our son and our daughter-in-law were expecting their first child, they had as their means of transportation a pickup truck, which is very common, of course, for young people these days.

There's something, you know, very special about a pickup rather than just an ordinary car. I mean, no respectable young person would just drive an ordinary car. You drive a pickup.

So they had this pickup that they were expecting a child in. And Jane and I talked it over and we said, they cannot put an infant seat in that pickup. We had two cars, and so we decided that we would give them one of our cars.

You have to understand that our son was teaching part-time as a lecturer at the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus, and he was doing that in order to have more time for ministry among Muslim people, of which there are about 50 or 60,000 in the Dearborn area. And so we knew that they could not afford to just go out and buy another car, so we decided that we would give them one of our cars. So we drove that car to Dearborn.

We took the title with us, and when we got there, Dan and I went down to the motor vehicle registration office, and Jane had already signed her name, and I signed the title over to Dan and Lisa. And at that time, that car legally became theirs. We presented it to them.

But not only did it legally become theirs, it emotionally became theirs from our point of view. That is to say, once we signed that title over to them, in our minds, it was their car. To do with as they pleased.

We knew that in another year or so, they would be leaving the U.S. to go to the Middle East to minister over there, and we knew that at that time, they would sell that car and probably use the proceeds as part of their passage money to get overseas. And it was not in our mind. It never even occurred to us to think, well now, when they sell that car, we get the money back, because after all, it was our car.

No, when we signed that title, we not only made a legal transaction, we made an emotional transaction. Now fast forward a couple, three years, and they come home on furlough for three months. And again, Jane and I looked at each other, and we said, they're going to need a car while they're here.

You can see how this is headed. We had replaced the car that we gave away, so again, we had the two cars. And we decided that we would loan them one of our cars.

It happened to be my car that was loaned. And during those three months, I have to say, I had mixed emotions. On the one hand, we were happy that we could provide them the car that they needed.

On the other hand, I missed my car. And I had to arrange with Jane, may I use your car? Now God has not asked us to loan ourselves to him. He's asked us to present ourselves to him as a living sacrifice to use as he pleases.

If you and I are going to endure to the end, we have to continually renew that commitment, that consecration. Now the fact is, objectively, this has already taken place. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20 that we are not our own.

We were bought with a price. But Paul wants us to affirm in our hearts and in our emotions what is true in reality. But he approaches it by way of an appeal.

He does not say, this is your duty to do. He does not say, you're not your own. You don't have a choice in the matter.

He says, I appeal to you by the mercies of God. We see something similar to this in the book of Philemon. That little one chapter letter from Paul to this man Philemon.

And you remember the story. Philemon owned a slave by the name of Onesimus. And at some point prior to this letter, Onesimus had deserted Philemon and had probably stolen in the process.

And he had made his way from what is now modern day Turkey across Greece all the way to Italy, and he finally encounters Paul in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment. And Paul leads him to Christ. And Paul discipled him.

And Paul realizes that there is an issue. Onesimus needs to make things right with Philemon. And so he sends Onesimus back to Philemon, but he sends with him this letter.

And this is what he says in verse 8 and 9 in this letter. Basically, let me just say to you that the purpose of the letter is to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus, to forgive him for having run away and probably having stolen in the process. And not only to forgive him, but now to receive him as a brother.

Now that's quite a thing to ask. And so this is the way Paul approaches it. Verses 8 and 9. Accordingly, though, I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required.

Notice this. In effect, Paul is saying Philemon, if you want to obey God, you don't really have a choice in this. But he doesn't do that.

He says, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake, I prefer to appeal to you. Paul wanted Philemon to desire to do what it was his duty to do. He did not want to coerce Philemon.

And so he appeals to him. Through the gospel, as you read through the letter, Paul is saying, Philemon, remember, you owe your very life to me. I'm the one who led you to Christ.

But he appeals to Philemon to do for love's sake that which he should do in obedience to the command of God. And in the same way, the Apostle Paul appeals to us. He says, I appeal to you by the mercies of God.

John MacArthur last night told us something about the mercies of God. But mercy and compassion are kind of synonymous terms. And there are various instances when we need to show mercy or when God needs to show mercy.

For example, the Good Samaritan is an illustration of showing mercy to someone who has a physical need. But when Paul said, I am the chief of sinners but I receive mercy, he's saying that God forgave me of my sin. Or the parable of the unjust servant in Matthew 18, when this servant owed his master 10,000 talents and he was forgiven.

And then he goes out and he throws into jail a fellow servant who owes him only 100 denarii. And when the master hears about it, he calls him in and he said, should you have not had mercy upon your fellow servant even as I had mercy on you? And Paul says, I appeal to you by the mercies of God. Do you want to know what the mercy of God looks like? Read the first five verses of Ephesians 2. We were dead in trespasses and sins.

We were absolutely helpless. We were not just sick, we were dead. We were slaves to the world and to Satan and to our own sinful natures.

And we were by nature objects of God's wrath. That's our condition. That's why we needed mercy.

And then Paul says, but God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith ye loved us made us alive in Christ Jesus. That's mercy. Dear friends, do you see yourself today as an object of God's mercy? Did you realize that apart from his mercy you would be headed for an eternal damnation? Paul says, I appeal to you by the mercies of God.

As we live with the gospel, as we appropriate the gospel, and I'm not suggesting that we say, we count this off, okay, I appropriate the gospel, then I present myself as a living sacrifice. What I want you to understand today is that the appropriation of the gospel should lead us spontaneously to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. It's not something that we check off and say, well, I've done that, it's my duty to do.

No. We're talking about communion with God. We're talking about God embraced by his love and his mercy and his grace.

And we see that in the gospel. The apostle John says this is how God showed his love to us. He sent his one and only son to be the propitiation for our sins.

To exhaust the wrath of God that you and I should have experienced. And as we bask in his love, as we really genuinely bask in his love, that will lead us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. But it has to be renewed daily.

We can't live today on yesterday's commitment. What does this look like in life? Well, in my own case, one illustration is this. Being 77 years old and I look around at some of my friends and they have kind of slowed down.

And that's okay. I'm not being critical of that. But in fact, I'd like to kind of slow down myself.

But in the nature of what God has called me to do today, that's difficult to do. And I said to my wife, I get wearier to continue with deadlines. To prepare for this.

To write this article. To do this. These kinds of things.

How do I keep going? Each day, I say to God, I am your servant. You call the shots, so to speak. I'm grateful for the health that you've given me.

I'm grateful for the ministry that I did not deserve to have. And even though I might like to slow down, Lord, I am your servant to do your bidding. And if you and I want to endure to the end, we must constantly remind ourselves that we are his servants.

But to joyfully do that because of what he has done for us. The fourth essential doesn't have the word daily in it, but it would be continually. The fourth essential is a firm belief in the sovereignty and love of God.

And for that, I want to direct our attention to the little book of Lamentations, which is sandwiched in between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Lamentations 3 verses 37 to 38. Lamentations 3 verses 37 to 38.

Who has spoken and it came to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Now there are many passages which we could go to to look at the sovereignty and love of God, but there is a reason why I've chosen this particular passage. Years ago someone wrote a book that began with a three-word sentence Life is difficult. And most people would agree with that.

If you've lived any time, you would realize and agree that life is difficult, at least it's often difficult, and sometimes it's even painful. So life is frequently difficult and it's sometimes painful. And if you live long enough, you will experience both difficulties and pain.

And if you want to endure to the end, if you want to stand firm in the face of life's difficulties and pain, then you must have a firm belief in the sovereignty and the love of God. And we could add in the wisdom of God. Not only believe that God is in control of every event in his universe and specifically every event in your own life, but that God in exercising that control does so from his infinite love for you.

The reason I've chosen this particular passage is because in verse 37, the prophet says, who has spoken and it came to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? This verse affirms God's sovereignty over the actions of other people. So much of life's pain is caused by the sinful actions of other people. And if you do not believe that God is sovereign and in control of those, then you're tempted to become bitter and when you become bitter, then you begin to peel off.

And you will not stand firm. You will not endure. If you let other people's sinful actions cause you to be bitter.

And one of the ways that we can keep from becoming bitter, and there are a number of areas in this, and that's a whole subject that I could spend a whole other session on, but just let me say in the context here this morning, one of the ways that we keep from becoming bitter is to realize that God is in sovereign control even over the sinful actions of other people. Joseph is the classic illustration of this. Three times in Genesis 45, after Joseph had revealed himself to his brothers, he said, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

And then in chapter 15 verse 20, he says, you intended evil against me, but God intended good. Joseph believed in the sovereignty of God in the sinful actions of his brothers. Secondly, verse 38 says to us, is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? That is, God is in sovereign control over the difficulties and the pain just as much as he is in control over what we would consider to be the good things, the blessings of this life.

Now, we should thank God for the good things of life. We are to be thankful people. But what about the bad things? That is, things that we would consider bad.

Things that we would not choose to have in our lives. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5.18 to give thanks in all circumstances. And then he adds, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

That is to say, it is the moral will of God that we give thanks in all circumstances. In chapter 4, he said, it's the will of God that you abstain from sexual immorality. Obviously, that's speaking of the moral will of God.

And Paul uses the same phraseology in 5.18 where he says, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. It is the moral will of God that we give thanks in all circumstances. Now, how do we do this? We do it by faith.

We don't just grit our teeth and say, Lord, I don't feel thankful but you said to give thanks and so I'm going to give you thanks even though I don't feel thankful. That's not giving thanks. We do it by faith.

We do it by faith in the promises of God. We do it by faith in the words of Paul in Romans 8.29 for example. Just one of the promises where he says that all things work together.

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him. And then he defines the good in verse 29 as being conformed to the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what God is after.

He wants to conform us to the likeness of Christ and so he brings and he allows these various circumstances, circumstances that we ourselves would not choose. He brings them into our lives because he wants to use those circumstances in his way to conform us more and more to the likeness of Christ. And so by faith we can say, Lord, I do not know what particular purpose you have, what specific purpose you have in this difficulty or this pain, this trial, but you said that you will cause it to conform me more and more to Jesus Christ and for that I give you thanks.

So we do it by faith. We do it by faith in the promise that he will never leave us nor forsake us. The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13.5 quotes from the Old Testament and says, for he has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Now that word never again is an absolute word. It doesn't mean sometimes. Most of the time it means never will I forsake you.

You can, to use the expression, you can take that to the bank. You can count on that. God who cannot lie has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

I may allow you or put you in this very, very difficult and painful situation, but I will not forsake you. Or in Romans 8.38 and 39 when he says that either life or death, and we can kind of summarize that passage and say that God has said that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. It's possible that sometime in your life, things will just totally fall apart.

And you will feel that you have nothing left. Let me tell you there are two things that God will never take away. God will never take away the gospel.

In the most difficult days of your life, you still stand before God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Even your doubts are forgiven.

Because Christ fully trusted the Father on your behalf. And God will never take away His promises. These two things.

When everything else is stripped away. I mean if possible, you were brought to the point of being like Job. This you can count on.

You stand before God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He will never, never, never take the gospel away from you. And you have His promises.

Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. These are the four essentials.

Now I'm sure that there are other important considerations, but I believe that these are fundamental. And so I would commend them to you. The daily communion with God.

Focused time. The daily appropriation of the gospel. The daily presenting yourself as a living sacrifice.

And the continual firm belief in the sovereignty and the goodness of God. And finally, I would like to inject just another word for our consideration in the subject of standing firm or enduring to the end. And that's the word perseverance.

Now the word perseverance is very similar in meaning to the word endurance, and often we sort of equate those two words, but there is a subtle difference. The word endure means to stand firm, as is the theme of our conference. We are to stand firm.

We're not to be carried about with every wind of doctrine theologically. We're not to go off to this and that and the other. We're to stand firm.

But we need to do more than stand. We need to move forward. When Paul says, I have finished the race, obviously he was talking of motion.

And perseverance means to keep going in spite of obstacles. And so when Paul says, I have finished the race, basically he was saying, I have persevered. We do need to stand firm.

And the scripture over and over again uses that term to stand firm. Stand firm against the devil. Stand firm against the evil one.

Stand firm in the passage in Revelation 14 that we looked at last night. But remember, it's more than just standing still. If we get that idea, we've missed the point.

It's to move forward. It's to persevere. To be like Paul and say, I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the race. I've kept the course. May you and I be like the Apostle Paul.

Let's pray. Our Father, again, we come back to the realization that any of us in this room could be a demis. And it's only by your grace that each of us are here this day.

That we're not out chasing after the world in some way or other. And so, Father, we acknowledge our total dependence upon you. We acknowledge our total indebtedness to you.

And we give you thanks for your grace. But also, Father, we acknowledge our responsibility. And we pray that by your grace we would fulfill our responsibility that we would practice these disciplines which will enable us to stand and to finish the race.

And we ask this again in Jesus' name.

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