

ENDURE

# 2025 LCMS YOUTH GATHERING THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

—  
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BELIEVE

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2025 LCMS YOUTH GATHERING



## A Story of ENDURANCE

On August 8, 1914, an expedition left England that would test the limits of human perseverance. The leader of the 27-man crew, Sir Ernest Shackleton, was seeking to make the first land crossing of the uncharted Antarctic continent. The journey required sailing across 12,000 miles of open water, charging through 1,000 miles of partially frozen seas, and carving their way through massive ice jams littered with warehouse-size slabs of ice. The closer they got to their destination, the more treacherous the journey became. In January of 1915, only 100 miles from reaching land, the 300-ton Norwegian-built schooner became imprisoned in ice for good. Shackleton had no choice but to order his crew to abandon ship. Left on the frozen sea, they waited as the boat gave in to the crushing pressure like an empty soda can. An unforgiving nine-month polar winter on the ice followed as they held out hope for a dangerous (and unlikely) return home. When the ice thinned, the crew set sail again in the three small remaining lifeboats. Their only hope was Elephant Island — a desolate and uninhabited rock 100 miles away. For seven days they fought through storm and cold, bailing water constantly from their open lifeboats and chewing on frozen seal blubber to sustain themselves. Some of them barely survived.

There was no settlement or contact with the inhabited world on this island, however. So Shackleton enlisted five volunteers to take to the sea again in the largest (22.5 feet long) of the three lifeboats. Their goal: the whaling camps off South Georgia Island, some 800 miles north. In what is widely regarded as the most remarkable boat journey of all time, the six men spent 17 days crossing the planet's stormiest ocean. Historian Roland Huntford described their little boat as "an insect swimming in a tidal wave." With screws in the soles of their boots for traction, the six sailors navigated through snow, hurricane-force winds, and 20-foot seas. Emaciated and exhausted, they finally landed. From there they faced a 36-hour trek over 22-miles of unmapped, glacier-draped mountains to reach the whaling port. Miraculously, they made it. Without wasting time, they made three unsuccessful attempts to sail back to the crew on Elephant Island. Finally, on the fourth attempt four months later, Shackleton returned to Elephant Island in search of the men he had left behind. He found them holding onto the last threads of hope and sanity by huddling under the two remaining lifeboats and singing. Incredibly, not a single man was lost.

The name of the boat, the expedition, and the book that describes their unbelievable story was apt: they called it *Endurance*.<sup>1</sup>

Shackleton isn't the only figure known for enduring profound trials. Many other stories—both fictional and historical—from around the world and across the ages have captivated the human imagination. High schools continue to assign Homer's epic struggle home in *The Odyssey*. Statues of Atlas (the Titan and Greek god of endurance) bearing the heavens on his shoulders are displayed in prominent places around the world, including a mammoth version outside Rockefeller Square in New York. John Bunyan's allegory of Christian's journey to the celestial city in *The Pilgrim's Progress* has appeared in 200 languages and has never gone out of print. Peter Jackson has brought almost a billion visitors to Middle Earth to follow Frodo and Samwise Gamgee's mission to destroy the ring of power. We continue to find inspiration in Anne Frank's hiding place in Amsterdam and Louie Zamperini's unbroken determination in Japanese prison camps. We marvel (and wince) at Aron Ralston's one-armed escape after 127 hours under the boulder in Utah's Bluejohn Canyon and at John Akhwari's hobbled completion of a marathon at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

The common thread in these familiar stories is that they center around people who persevere. Against the odds, and with great difficulty, they pressed on, kept fighting, refused to give up, and eventually overcame.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Lansing, *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishing, 1959). Interestingly, the wreckage of the *Endurance* was recently discovered on March 5, 2022.

In other words, they **endured**. And in doing so, they have encouraged and inspired countless others to keep pushing through our own times of trial. We simply love hearing about people who endure.

The same goes for young people. You can tell by what they read (and watch) when they should be reading *The Grapes of Wrath* for sophomore English. Among the most popular types of story consumed by youth today is a growing body of recently produced literature and film known as “Young Adult Dystopian.” The dystopian genre itself isn’t new. George Orwell and Aldous Huxley (among others) have been offering dark and dismal visions of future societies for more than a century. But recent dystopian works have begun telling such stories from the perspective of young people—and our youth are devouring them. *Hunger Games* (2008–2010), *The Maze Runner* (2009), *Divergent* (2011–2018), *Squid Game* (2009 book, 2021 Netflix series), and *Scythe* (2016) portray worlds in which youth are forced to endure social injustice, psychological torment, and physical danger. The details in these stories vary, but in them all society has broken down, institutions have burned out, and the general public has been brutalized by an oppressive and terrorizing authoritarian state (usually made up of power-hungry adults). Columnist Laura Miller says we shouldn’t be surprised why young people find such stories so compelling:

“If ... you consider the [Hunger G]ames as a fever-dream allegory of the adolescent social experience, they become perfectly intelligible. Adults dump teen-agers into the viper pit of high school, spouting a lot of sentimental drivel about what a wonderful stage of life it’s supposed to be. The rules are arbitrary, unfathomable, and subject to sudden change. A brutal social hierarchy prevails, with the rich, the good-looking, and the athletic lording their advantages over everyone else. To survive you have to be totally fake. Adults don’t seem to understand how high the stakes are; your whole life could be over, and they act like it’s just some “phase”! Everyone’s always watching you, scrutinizing your clothes or your friends and obsessing over whether you’re having sex or taking drugs or getting good enough grades, but no one cares who you really are or how you really feel about anything.”<sup>2</sup>

According to their own particular station in life, youth today are quite familiar with the need to endure. But not all of them are doing it successfully.

A few years ago, LCMS Youth Ministry articulated what it looks like to have healthy Christian youth in healthy Christian congregations. Its *Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry*<sup>3</sup> suggested that, among other things, healthy young people have developed “a resilient identity in Christ.” Notice the word “resilient.” Healthy young Christians have not avoided difficulties. Instead, they have suffered trials, tragedies, and suffering. But they have not given up. They do not cave in or tap out. Resilient in their identity in Christ, they persevere, hold out, press on. In short, they *endure*.

The healthy ones do, at least. Unfortunately, many aren’t healthy. Rather than persevering with a resilient faith, many young Christians live with a faith that is fragile and frail. For some, this is because their faith has not been tested. They have not undergone significant suffering or difficulty. We know it will come, however. So, part of the church’s task is to prepare young people for the dark night of the soul that will inevitably come to us all. Others, however, have experienced difficulty and have lost their faith. Sometimes they storm away from the church over a specific issue. Other times they slowly wander off with little more than a shrug and a “meh.” This is happening more often than we would like to admit. Recent research from Barna reports that 59% of young

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2 Laura Miller, “Fresh Hell: What’s Behind the Boom in Dystopian Fiction for Young Readers?” in *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2010.

3 <http://www.youthsource.com/7-practices/>

people with a Christian background report that they have dropped out of attending church regularly.<sup>4</sup> It seems increasingly the case that those who have a resilient faith—a faith that *endures*—are in the minority.

## **ENDURE: The Verb Behind the Theme**

The theme for the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering is ENDURE. At first glance, it seems rather simple. It's a single word, after all. But together with its relatives ("enduring," "endurance," "durable"), endure is far from a simple concept. Loaded with backstory, it depends on and flows from a number of fundamental human realities. The word also carries several different meanings. And when viewed from a Christian perspective, it touches on foundational aspects of our faith and life together.

Before getting into the theology, let's think about the word itself for a minute. Endure can communicate two different ideas. The first is roughly synonymous with being patient or resilient, exercising perseverance, showing determination and resolve. In this sense, endure is most often used to describe something that *people* are forced to do (or not). That is, human beings are the subject of the verb. They are forced to endure because there is something particularly unpleasant going on in their lives. A problem, a trial, a difficulty, a challenge, some type of suffering. This unpleasantness is necessary for the word to make sense, for unless something has gone wrong, there is no need to persevere. (It would be nonsense, for example, to speak of having to *endure* a bowl of New Orleans' finest shrimp gumbo.) The stories of endurance listed above—including those in the category of young adult dystopian—work with endure in this first sense.

In the stories mentioned above, the difficulties and evils are often extraordinary. It's hard to get more extreme than a society that forces kids to hunt and kill each other. But not all situations in real life calling for endurance are so exceptional. In fact, most occasions requiring endurance for young people today are remarkably *unremarkable*. If we were to consider what the average young person who will attend the Gathering is forced to endure, it is more likely to be such things as the daily grind of the school schedule, complications with a broken home, outbreaks of acne, drama with peers, limitations on screen time, a concern about body image, freshman physics, puberty, or helicopter parenting. This is not to diminish the endurance such experiences require, however. The suffering caused by such things are real and significant. Rather than scoff at such trials (as adults may be tempted to do), we should recognize that these types of challenges are the source of anxiety, insecurity, identity confusion, loneliness, depression, despair, and even suicide. Endurance in this first sense of the word, at whatever level someone is forced to experience it, always takes place because of something difficult.

But there is a second sense to the word endure. This has to do with permanence, stability, and dependability. This sense may refer to people, but the subject is more likely something else. We are grateful for friendships that endure through both good times and bad. We find security in alliances that endure despite political upheaval and changing circumstances. We put our confidence in a well-built hotel, trusting that the construction will endure hurricane force winds. Things that endure in this sense can be a great comfort to those who feel tossed about and whipped around without any anchor to hold things down. To speak of endure in this sense is often good news. That's not to say that this sense of the word is *always* positive, however. Some things endure that aren't so good. Headaches, boring lectures, pandemics, strife at home, bouts of depression, a tainted reputation, a dysfunctional congregation. The enduring of such things (in the second sense of the word) is often what forces us to endure (in the first sense of the word).

Both senses of ENDURE are used in the Scriptures, and both should figure prominently at the Gathering.

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<sup>4</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Baker, 2011), 23.

## “Consider Him Who ENDURED”

If there is one absolute necessity for this (or any other) Youth Gathering, it is that we must focus our attention on helping every participant consider “Him who endured” the cross for us. Not only is Jesus the right answer to most Sunday School questions. He is also the one whose faithful endurance is our only hope for enduring life in this sin-wrecked creation. Notice how the theme verse for this Gathering ties Jesus’ endurance to ours:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who **endured** from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

It is only through faith and life in the one who endured the cross and its shame that we are able to endure our own trials in life. Some of these trials come from the outside and impose themselves on us. Others come from within and our own failings. Still others come from our brothers and sisters in Christ. (See more on this below.) But before we get too deep into the endurance of Jesus for us, and because we’ve invoked the Gathering theme verse, we should make a few things clear about the book of Hebrews and how we intend to use it for this Gathering.

Unlike some Gatherings (Chosen, 2007; Live Love[d], 2013; In Christ Alone, 2016) we do not intend for this Gathering to attempt a full unpacking of a single book of the Bible. That is, ENDURE won’t be known as the “Hebrews” Gathering. There are several reasons for this. Some are pragmatic. The letter is simply too long for an event this short. Some are historical and have to do with its reception in the early church. Others are related to some challenging interpretive issues that would require extensive study and consideration. The most significant reason to pass on a full study of Hebrews, however, has to do with the purpose of the Gathering. The goal of this Gathering is to help young Christian endure whatever challenges they are facing with a resilient faith in Jesus and a vigorous life of love in His name. To do *that*, we don’t need to study the whole book of Hebrews.

Even if we don’t study the entire book, we should not think of Hebrews as the shell of the crab legs at Commanders Palace. It is more than just the casing around a few inspiring theme verses. Taken as a whole (and in several specific ways), the book of Hebrews does a number of things that we should try to do at this Gathering. Martin Franzmann names three characteristics of this book that could provide a road map:

### 1. It is founded on the Old Testament.

The book of Hebrews, Franzmann says, is “to a large extent an interpretation and exposition of Old Testament Scriptures. It has been likened to a Christian sermon or series of sermons on selected Psalms (2, 8, 95, 110). The letter therefore contains high testimony to the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.”<sup>5</sup> More than most, Hebrews draws from and illuminates the Scriptures that Jesus Himself heard and read. “Only Matthew in the New Testament rivals this book for the range and hermeneutical complexity of the Old Testament texts it cites.”<sup>6</sup>

Hebrews’ emphasis on the Old Testament is helpful because of the widespread lack of familiarity with the biblical narrative among contemporary young (and old) Christians. It has

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<sup>5</sup> Franzmann, 244.

<sup>6</sup> D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Zondervan, 1992) 405.

been well-documented that biblical literacy is low. Some of the biggest gaps in the average Christian's understanding of this story today are located in the Old Testament. This is both understandable and predictable. When compared to the New Testament, the Old Testament is much longer, covers much more history, comes from an even more foreign time and place, and is less obviously about Jesus. Furthermore, the Old Testament suffers from a lectionary that cuts and slices its narrative context like a sous chef preparing snapper ceviche at Emeril's. As a result, many participants at ENDURE will be unfamiliar with the characters, setting, and plotline of the Old Testament portion of the biblical narrative.

This is more than just unfortunate. It is a significant obstacle to understanding who Jesus is, what He has done, and who we are as His people. Again, Franzmann: "The Old Testament is therefore of abiding value and enduring significance for the people of God in the last days, for it enables them to see the whole sweep and direction of the mighty redeeming arm of God."<sup>7</sup> Without these writings it is simply impossible to understand the life and mission of Jesus. Elizabeth Achtemeier put it like this: "Jesus Christ is, in the New Testament, the Word of the Old made flesh—the new promised action of God (Isaiah 43:19) that nevertheless gathers up the promises of the Old Testament and brings them to their final interpretation and conclusion."<sup>8</sup> If we don't consider the specific promises that Jesus came to fulfill, we'll likely make up new promises and along with them a Jesus that is not consistent with the entirety of the biblical narrative.

For this Gathering, therefore, the book of Hebrews and its explicit connections to the Old Testament will help us properly locate Jesus and ourselves within the larger biblical narrative. Most obviously, and most closely connected to the theme verse, this means giving attention to Hebrews 11 and its extended list of those who endured in faith as they looked forward to the God's promised Messiah.

## **2. It is centered in Christ.**

The theme for my seventh-grade daughter's Lutheran grade school this year is "Give me Jesus." That's not a bad way to think about a school year. It's also a helpful way to think about what we're trying to do at the Gathering. This should be obvious, for any time we study the Scriptures we recognize that they were written so that we would believe in Jesus and have life in His name. (cf. John 20:31). But lest we get distracted, we need to be clear from beginning to end that our job is to proclaim the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17), the crucified, risen, and returning one (1 Cor. 1:18, 13; 15:20–23).

Hebrews is no different. Franzmann summarizes this letter: "Christ, the Son of God, dominates the whole, and Christ colors every part of the whole. He stands at the beginning of history as the Son through whom God created the world; He stands at the end of all history as the divinely appointed 'heir of all things' (Heb. 1:2)."<sup>9</sup> Like all Christian theology in general, this book is thoroughly and unmistakably Christological.<sup>10</sup> Notice how the opening and the closing verses provide a Christological bracket for the entire letter:

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<sup>7</sup> Franzmann, 245.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, "The Canon as the Voice of the Living God" in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 125.

<sup>9</sup> Franzmann, 245.

<sup>10</sup> See David P. Scaer, "All Theology Is Christology: An Axiom in Search of Acceptance." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 80:1–2 (Jan–April 1026), 49–62.

Hebrews 1:1–2

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us **by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, **through whom also he created the world.**<sup>3</sup> He is the **radiance of the glory of God** and the **exact imprint of his nature**, and **he upholds the universe** by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, **he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**,<sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 13:20–21

“<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who **brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus**, the **great shepherd of the sheep**, by the **blood** of the eternal covenant,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, **through Jesus Christ**, to whom be **glory** forever and ever. Amen.

As we examine more closely what it means to “preach Christ,” we should recognize there are two things we must communicate in order to proclaim the gospel. First, we must clearly describe the work of God in Christ, namely, His life, death, resurrection, and return. But simply talking *about* Jesus’ work is not enough. Second, we must clearly speak the promise of Christ to the participants at the Gathering. Through these first-to-second person promises of Jesus, God works to (1) awaken and strengthen saving faith and (2) enliven those who believe to a life of love and service toward others.

But *how* shall we describe the work of Jesus? And *what* shall we promise in His name? There are a variety of biblical ways to do both. In his reflection on the fullness of the Gospel, Jacob Preus notes that there are many different biblical metaphors that articulate the significance of the literal events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and the justification His work accomplished. “Each Gospel word, phrase, and idea is necessary to the fullness of the biblical doctrine of justification. Every Gospel word contributes something distinctive, something unique, which, if it were not present, would make the doctrine less than the whole, less than fully what the Lord revealed.”<sup>11</sup> This suggests that we return to the theme verse to notice *how* it directs our attention to Christ and *what* it says about the work of Jesus:

Hebrews 12:1–3

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.  
<sup>3</sup> Consider him who **endured** from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

What did Jesus do through His death and resurrection in these verses? Notice how this passage does *not* speak about Jesus’ work. It does not utilize a nourishment metaphor (which would emphasize Jesus as the living water or the bread of life). It does not employ a commerce metaphor (which would emphasize that Jesus has purchased us or that He possesses us). It does not operate with a deliverance metaphor (which would emphasize that Jesus has freed us from captivity or released us from bondage). Instead, it describes Jesus’ work in terms of *endurance*. He “endured” the cross for us. He “despised” (looked down on, disregarded, treated with contempt, was not afraid of) its shame. He “endured” hostility from sinners

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob A. O. Preus. *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*, (CPH, 2000), 24.

against Himself and willingly submitted to the will of His Father. For us, Jesus put up with rejection, hostility, abuse, even the shameful death of crucifixion. He endured all of this for us.

Notice also *why* He endured these things. “For the joy that was set before him” (12:2). Like the prize that awaits an athlete upon completing the race, this joy has victorious and eschatological overtones.<sup>12</sup> It refers to the joy of His own resurrection on the third day (see 13:20) as well as the joy that He anticipates for all who endure with Him through death into the final resurrection on the last day. Here is the heart of the promise this Gathering will proclaim. The one who endured through death into life has promised that all who trust in Him and endure with faith will also rise from the dead into eternal joy. Their sin-induced death will not hold them any more than it held Jesus, and they will rise with him when He returns.

The image of Jesus here is one of dogged determination who refused to give up and refused to give in no matter how bad it got. His time of joy has come, and He is pleased (and joyful) to share that promise with us here and now.

### 3. It looks toward the end.

The book of Hebrews is unmistakably future oriented. It proclaims the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus with an overtly eschatological accent. That is, it points repeatedly (although sometimes indirectly) toward the end of life in this present world and the great day of Jesus’ return. Jesus’ first coming was “the beginning of the end; the new world of God [that] has become a reality in the midst of the old.”<sup>13</sup> Like all of the New Testament authors, the writer of Hebrews believed that the ascended Jesus would be returning soon. “[T]he Day is drawing near (Heb. 10:25) when all that is now a sure hope shall be fully realized.”<sup>14</sup> Notice how often this comes up in the book of Hebrews:

“But in these **last** days...” (1:2)

“At present, we do not **yet** see everything in subjection to him” (2:8)

“But exhort one another every day, **as long as** it is called today” (3:13)

“We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope **to the end**” (6:12)

“What is becoming obsolete and growing old is **ready to vanish away**” (8:13)

“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear a second time**, not to deal with sin but to save those who are **eagerly waiting** for him” (9:28)

“He sat down at the right hand of God, **waiting from that time** until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (10:13)

“all the more as you see **the Day drawing near**” (10:25)

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may **receive what is promised**” (10:36)

“Yet a little while, and **the coming one will come** and not delay” (10:37)

With this view to the end, the author of Hebrews calls Christians to endure. In fact, the call to endurance permeates this letter almost as much as it points toward the end.

<sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we **hold our original confidence** firm to the end. (3:13–14)

<sup>12</sup> See John Kleinig, *Hebrews*, Concordia Commentary Series. (CPH, 2017), 596.

<sup>13</sup> Franzmann, 246.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



<sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For **you have need of endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. (10:35)

<sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who **have faith and preserve their souls**. (10:39)

<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, **so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted** (12:4)

Hebrews encourages Christians to endure to the end using a variety of analogies. One that might resonate well with many Gathering participants has to do with the race. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (12:1). While it is not a dominant theme in the Scriptures, this is not the only place we read about the Christian life in terms of athletics (see also Phil. 2:16; Gal. 2:2 and 5:7; and 2 Tim. 4:7). Both the cloud of witnesses and the one who runs calls to mind the image of a track meet with crowds in the stands cheering on the athletes. "Thus our author pictures himself and his readers as competitors who, as they contend for the faith in the arena of life, are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, namely, those champions of faith and perseverance of earlier generations, crowded as it were row upon row within the encircling amphitheater."<sup>15</sup>

While not every young person at the Gathering plays on a team, and while it's possible for preachers and teachers to overuse sports analogies, the image of a race is fitting when it comes to endurance. Any athlete who has ever had to run ladders or hills or miles can relate. We should also be aware that the majority of high school students *do*, in fact, participate in formal athletic programs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 57% of high school students played on at least one school or community sports team in the past year.<sup>16</sup> Which means that a sports analogy or two at the Gathering might not only be possible, but perhaps quite helpful and appropriate.

Allow me to make one more comment about Hebrews and its eschatological orientation. I was describing to my son the importance of keeping the end in view as we struggle to endure suffering in this life. He's not a Greek scholar, so he didn't worry about the fact that there is no etymological connection between the words "end" (*telos*) and "endure" (*hupomeno*) in Greek. But he did notice that the English word **endure** has the **end** in its spelling. This is a felicitous connection. We **endure** knowing that there is an **end** to our suffering, and since we know that the **end** will be good, the **enduring** is also somehow good.

## THE Story of ENDURANCE

At the beginning of this theological study we considered several stories of endurance. These stories are well known and compelling because they are, in fact, *stories*. Like any narrative, they have a beginning, they develop along a definite plot, and they come a certain end. This is important to notice, for narrative is fundamental to what it means to be human.<sup>17</sup> Stories are the scaffolding with which we make sense of our lives. Without having to think about it, we automatically locate our daily experiences within a larger ongoing narrative. This is as necessary as it is natural, for it enables us to make coherent sense of our lives instead of

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<sup>15</sup> Hughes, 519.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/statistics-on-school-sports-how-many-students-play-sports-which-sports-do-they-play/2021/07>

<sup>17</sup> Stephen D. Crites. "The Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 295.

passing from one random and detached episode to another. Each of us tells ourselves a story about where we came from, who we belong to, and where we are going.

The Scriptures also tell a story. In fact, to be a Christian is to believe and live according to a single narrative that encompasses everything.<sup>18</sup> Having this narrative in mind allows us to read the Scriptures responsibly, live faithfully as followers of Jesus, and locate our hope rightly in His promises. Without this narrative context, even these promises can be misplaced or distorted in service to some other account of everything. Consider, for example, the individual who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness (which is very helpful when he feels guilty) but has no conception of himself as a member of the body of Christ who is inseparably united to all believers of all times. In the individualistic age in which we live today, this is a common distortion of the Christian faith and life.<sup>19</sup>

But what is the Christian story? There is no single way to tell it. The ecumenical creeds, for example, tell a version. They emphasize three main movements which correspond to the three members of the Trinity. The creeds begin with the Creator who made all things. They center around the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return of Jesus, the Son. And they conclude with the work of the Spirit in the church, the final day of judgment, and the eternal reign of the Lamb on His throne. The creeds were not written, as such, to be stories (the Nicene Creed, for instance, was composed to guard against specific heresies that had arisen in the early church). But the narrative shape of what they confess is unmistakable.

In recent decades, theologians have begun summarizing the content of the Bible explicitly in terms of the narrative it tells.<sup>20</sup> Christopher Wright suggests six movements to this story. He makes use of symbols to help distinguish them:

- ↓ Creation
- × Fall
- Promise to Abraham and faithfulness to Israel
- † Jesus
- Church and its mission
- ↓ Return of Jesus and the new creation<sup>21</sup>

While the symbols aren't essential, there are a few things to notice about how they can help us keep important parts of the Christian story straight.

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18 Joel P. Okamoto, "The Word of the Cross and the Story of Everything" in *Concordia Journal* 45.3 (Summer 2019), 51–66.

19 David R. Schmitt, "Telling God's Story," *Concordia Journal* 40.2 (2014), 101–112.

20 Contrast this approach to summarizing the Bible with an approach that would mine the Bible for ideas, concepts, or even doctrines. While a faithful conception of the Bible as a coherent narrative has a definite and important place for ideas, concepts, and doctrines, they must find their place within the larger story.

21 Christopher Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2016), 33–36.

First, there are no arrows going up. The God of the Scriptures is always a God who comes down to us. He does not demand that we make our way up to Him by anything we can do or think or feel. This flies in the face of conventional human wisdom. Gerhard Forde explains: “We tend to think that [the Christian faith] has to do primarily with ‘going up’ somewhere—either to heaven or to some kind of ‘religious perfection.’ The Christian faith is often likened to climbing a ladder or, if you will, a staircase.”<sup>22</sup> But that’s not how the biblical story goes. The symbols in Wright’s summary of the story remind us that God always comes down to us—through Jesus, through proclamation of God’s commands and promises, through tangible gifts of bread and wine and water, through words of absolution, and through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>23</sup> Any conception of the Christian narrative that requires humans to make their way up to God will inevitably lead to some form of idolatrous works righteousness.

Second, there are no arrows going backwards. This reminds us that the story is always moving forward. This is not to say that we should never look back. It has always been important for the people of God to recall and rejoice at what God has done for us in the past. This was a constant refrain in the Old Testament as prophets reminded the people of Israel of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt. Every celebration of the Passover (and every celebration of the Lord’s Supper that was instituted during the celebration of Passover) directs attention back to God’s mighty acts in the past—both to the Exodus and to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But even as we remember what God has done in the past and give thanks for his faithfulness, we do not *live* in the past. And we do not try to recover the past. We live as a “people ahead of time” as we “sight, signal, support, and celebrate” the consummation of the reign of God that will be for all to see when Jesus returns on the last day.<sup>24</sup> We long for the new Jerusalem, the new creation, the return of Jesus, and the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. To recall a helpful slogan, we live in the “now, but not yet.” We rejoice in God’s present gifts and the resurrection we have already received in our Baptism. And yet we continue to long for His return and the restoration of all things.

With help from Wright’s symbols, it is easy to recognize the Christian narrative as a story of endurance:

- ↓ **Creation**  
In the beginning God created all things. Everything was good. Very good. Humans, made in his image, were the crown of His creation. God gave them authority and dominion to exercise according to His command. There was no need to **endure** suffering, for there was no sin or sorrow.
- × **Fall**  
The first humans rebelled against God by disobeying his Word. God was not pleased. He cursed them, and with them all creation. Their punishment was suffering and death. As a result of their sin, the previously very good creation was from then on plagued by chaos, evil, and estrangement. **Endurance** was now a tragic necessity.
- **A Chosen People**  
But God did not abandon His creation. Instead, He began acting on His promise to the first humans to redeem his creation. To do this, He chose Abraham and Sarah to receive an **enduring** covenant. Their promised family would become known as Israel, through whom God would bless all nations.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, (Augsburg, 1972), 7–8.

<sup>23</sup> In the Smalcald Articles (III.4) Luther names five means of the gospel, which we usually refer to as the means of grace. They are (1) preaching of the gospel, (2) absolution, (3) baptism, (4) the Lord’s Supper, and (5) the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Through these five means God promises forgiveness, life, and salvation. See Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Augsburg, 2001), 319.

<sup>24</sup> Richard John Neuhaus speaks this way in *Freedom for Ministry* (Eerdmans, 1979), 134–136.

This family was not faithful, however. They continually turned away from God and rebelled against Him. To call them back God sent prophet after prophet, for His love for His people **endured**. Some of His people demonstrated resilient faith that **endured** despite great difficulty, and some of their names are listed in Hebrews 11.



### **Jesus**

After centuries of rejecting his prophets, and after sending them into exile as a result, God send his own Son. Jesus came to save his people from their sin and establish the reign of God. To this end he called his people to repent and believe in him. They rejected him, however, and put him to death for claiming to be the Son of God who could forgive sins. Through it all, he remained faithful to the mission His Father has given Him, **enduring** the cross and scorning its shame. But he did not stay dead. After suffering a humiliating death at their hands, he was vindicated by God by his resurrection from the dead. This demonstrated that he is, in fact, who he said he was and able to do what he claimed to do. He is the Lord over all creation who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He has redeemed his creation, especially his human creatures, and through his sacrificial love has atoned for sin, brought abundant life, and secured eternal salvation for all the world. His gracious reign **endures** even through death into life. Just as he promised.



### **A New People**

Before returning to His Father, Jesus commissioned His chosen people to continue His work by teaching His commands, calling all people to repentance, and proclaiming His life-giving promises. The blessing promised to Abraham was now coming explicitly and fully to *all* people of *all* nations. To equip His people for this work and enable them to **endure** faithfully, He gave them His own Spirit. Jesus warned them that their lives would be a struggle. They would meet opposition from within (their own sinful nature as individuals and even in the church) and from without (the world that continues to reject its Creator). But He promised they would **endure** as a people, even against the gates of Hell. They would be surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—the church militant *and* the church triumphant—which would be a source of encouragement and strength as they **endure** to the end.



### **The New Creation**

As He promised, Jesus will return on the last day to judge the living and the dead and make all things new. On that day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Those who **endured** tribulation through faith in Christ will enjoy eternal life. On that day there will be no more need for **endurance** (in the first sense of the word), for there will be no more suffering. The only thing that will **endure** (in the second sense of the word) is the glory of Christ and the unity and joy of His restored creation.

### ***Distinctions in this Story***

Keeping this story straight is not always easy. Cultural winds, the cunning of sinful humanity, and a constant inclination to make humans the center of the story has led to countless alterations and distortions. Sometimes important parts of the story are explicitly rejected. Other times, parts of the story are benignly neglected. For this reason, we must continually return to the Scriptures and make sure we are telling and living according to the one true biblical story of everything. In this sense, Christians must be fiercely biblical. As we strive to read the Scriptures faithfully, a number of important (and sometimes paradoxical) distinctions have proven over the centuries to be helpful. Some have been mentioned above, but here we will name and explain them to make sure we are clear about what they mean.

### ***Simul iustus et peccator***

This Latin phrase means “at the same time saint and sinner” and it characterizes every Christian who has ever lived or will live on this side of Jesus’ return. God-given faith in God’s life-giving promise makes us fully and completely righteous. This is no legal fiction. We *are* righteous through faith in Jesus. As most New Testament letters begin, we are saints, sanctified, holy and blameless. This is the reality of the Gospel. This is who we are. Perfect, forgiven, redeemed, restored. No caveats. No qualifications. When Hebrews 13:24 encourages the reader to greet “all the saints,” it is talking about *all* Christians.

At the same time, sin “clings closely” (Heb. 12:1) to each of us. To the very core of our beings we remain hopeless and helpless, bound to sin against God and one another. This is the source of much of our suffering. Indeed, among the greatest things we must **endure** is the difficulties caused by our own sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. It is always tempting for Christians to identify *external* causes of suffering (such as the world or other people) as the single (or, at least, primary) cause of the difficulties we face in life. As the saying goes, there is nothing so awful as *other people’s* sins. But Christians also must always look in the mirror and notice their own blame for the suffering they encounter. Not every struggle we face is self-induced. But some are, and most involve our sinfulness in some way.

Our need to endure the difficulties caused by our own sin leads us to respond continually with repentant hearts. “Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely” (12:1). Luther was clear in the first of his 95 theses. He described the daily life of a Christian as a life of daily repentance. This is more than a weekly exercise of saying sorry. And it is not a life of passivity. Empowered by the Spirit and active in faith in love, this is a continual turning away from our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. It is a continual rejection of false versions of the biblical narrative. It is a continual turning to the cross in humility and faith. It is a continual return to baptism, where we remember God’s promises and find renewed vigor to leave behind a life of sin (Rom. 6:4), offer our bodies as living sacrifices in service to others (Rom. 12:1), and embrace fellow believers as members of our own bodies (1 Cor. 12:13).

### **Now, but not yet**

The Christian existence as saint and sinner at the same time is a paradox. A related paradox has to do with the *time* in which we live. In the present, we are already recipients of God’s full and life-giving grace. We have already been raised with Jesus and enjoy the beginning of eternal life by His Spirit. The end has already come. And because it is a good end, we are filled with joy and gratitude, for all things are ours in Him (1 Cor. 3:22).

And yet, we wait. We wait for Jesus to return and make all things new. This waiting is not easy. We wait and we long. We wait and we pray. We wait and we strain to see dimly as we look forward to seeing clearly (1 Cor. 13:12). We wait and we cry out with the saints, “How long, O Lord?” (see Rev. 6:10). We wait and we beg, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

This “now, but not yet” paradox is not an invitation to escapism. Rather than taking us away from the present, it changes our perspective on our current circumstances. As Thomas Long puts it, “It is primarily a way of seeing the present in light of hope.”<sup>25</sup> We look honestly and directly at the present—and both its goodness and wickedness—but we see it with a new perspective. Which is to say that we see *more* than the suffering we are forced to endure. By faith we know that the present things of this world are, indeed, passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). The suffering we experience produces endurance, “and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom. 5:3–5). This hope does not disappoint us. Instead, it enables us to endure whatever comes our way, for we know that our current suffering will not compare the future glory and joy that is ours in Jesus (Rom. 8:18–25). We live by the promise of life in Christ, and

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Long, *Preaching From Memory To Hope* (Westminster John Knox, 2009), 129.

this promise is enough: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10–11).

Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a concrete example of what the “now, but not yet” this looks like. We come to the table with joy and gratitude for the gifts of forgiveness and life promised and received in this meal. Yet we also recognize that it is still only a “foretaste” of the feast to come. Jesus is still “absent” in ways that one day will no longer be the case.<sup>26</sup> Christians are never content, therefore, with only the appetizer. We’re always looking forward to the full meal. As Mark Allen Powell puts it, “It seems to me that the more often Christians take Communion, the more impatient they should become.”<sup>27</sup> Our patient endurance, then, is characterized by an impatient longing for Jesus to return.

### **In, but not of**

The church today exists in a culture that is increasingly foreign to us. Although most participants at the Gathering have experienced nothing close to the kind of persecution some Christians have experienced in the past and are experiencing in places around the world, the crumbling of Christendom and end of the Constantinian privilege has made life increasingly less comfortable for Christians in the West. It has also helped clarify who we are and whose we are.

Who are we, particularly in relation to the world? In his prayer for the disciples on Maundy Thursday, Jesus described His followers as those who live in, “but not of the world” (John 17:14–15). But what does *this* look like? Walter Brueggemann suggests that we should think of ourselves as exiles. Much like the people of God in the Old Testament who lived in foreign lands under foreign governments (especially during the exilic period in the 6th Century BC), we live as resident aliens.<sup>28</sup> Our exile is not so much geographical, but “social, moral, and cultural.”<sup>29</sup> In this context the church finds itself in a situation in which “displacement, failed hopes, anger, wistful sadness, and helplessness permeate our sense of self, sense of community, and sense of future.”<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann offers six suggestions for preachers and teachers in this context.<sup>31</sup>

1. Exiles must learn to grieve their loss and express “honest sadness.” We do not hide from the tragic reality of living in a world wrecked by sin. Instead, we learn to lament what has been lost and are honest with ourselves about our exilic position.
2. Like orphans who have lost their homes, exiles “take with them old habits, old customs, old memories, old photographs.” We must be “rooted” in the past if we are to be faithful in the present. This rootedness shows itself in our confession and many of our traditions.

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26 Mark Allen Powell speaks about Jesus’ “real absence” at the Lord’s Supper as a balance to our emphasis on his real presence. While we celebrate his promise to be sacramentally present in the bread and wine, we also long for the day when he will be with us once again fully—as he was in his incarnation and as he will be on the last day. See his *Loving Jesus* (Fortress, 2004), 51–59.

27 Powell, *Loving Jesus*, 58.

28 Many theologians have reflected recently on the changing relationship between the church and the state in the West. No one questions the increasing inconvenience and even antagonism this has brought. For a classic consideration, see the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon’s influential *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Abingdon, 2014).

29 Walther Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching to Exiles* (Westminster John Knox, 1997), 2. David Kinnaman has called our current situation “Digital Babylon” in *Faith for Exiles* (Baker Books, 2019).

30 Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 3.

31 For the following six points, see Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 4–13. It should be noted that, while Brueggemann’s diagnosis of our current situation is insightful and worthy of careful reflection, he also approaches the Scriptures with an unfortunate abundance of historical-critical bias. We cannot accept everything he says about the exiles or the Scriptures, but he nonetheless has much to offer.

3. Exiles must recognize the powerful temptation of despair. If we are to resist the despair that leads to unfaithfulness, we must begin by recognizing the temptation to live in resignation.
4. The profound experience of God's absence among exiles is acknowledged alongside their confidence in His sacramental presence. Not only do we celebrate His promises and mysterious presence in bread and wine and water. We also long for Christ to return and be with us as He once was, and as He will be for all eternity.
5. Exiles should expect moral opposition. We should not be surprised at the moral decay we are increasingly experiencing in our current political-cultural environment. And we should be prepared to look and sound strange to those around us as we live by a different standard.
6. Exiles must be on guard against becoming so preoccupied with themselves that they lose a concern for those who are in desperate need of the same saving grace that God has shown us in Christ. As Brueggemann puts it, our "baptismal identity is not designed for a ghetto existence."

Earlier we noted that endurance is required in our struggle against an internal foe—namely, our sinful nature. At this point we should also notice that there is external opposition, as well. The degree to which the world is opposed to the Christian worldview differs by time and place, so we should be careful not to overgeneralize the challenges. But we cannot ignore the external forces that confront those who belong to Jesus. (Jesus' prayer in John 17:14–16 comes to mind again.) Whether it be an unpopular moral position, an unfamiliar discipline of the faith, or an unwillingness to indulge in the ways of the world, our young people should expect avoidance or disrespect (and even perhaps some form of persecution) for their faithfulness.

As we consider our lot as an exiled community of faith, there are certain figures in the Old Testament whose context was similar. In addition to the people listed in Hebrews 11, Brueggemann suggests we spend some time with Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia, and Daniel in Babylon. Rather than responding to suffering with fear or anger or disobedience, these people endured faithfully as foreigners. So shall we.

The Old Testament also provides some guidance for how to respond to life in exile. I'm thinking about the ancient art of lament. The book of Lamentations is an obvious example of the cries of those who mourn the loss of the promised land. There are likewise many examples of "lament Psalms" that provide honest and faithful language for all who grieve.<sup>32</sup> Christians who exist in an increasingly post-churched culture, and who live in a church that often burdens itself with self-induced suffering, we would do well to relearn the language of lament.

### **Individual v. communal faith and life**

Among the most fundamental challenges to faithful endurance today is the "other pandemic" that so many young people are struggling to survive.<sup>33</sup> Tyler Vanderweele, the director of The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard, identifies the problem: "Empirical research has, for some time, indicated the powerful effects that relationships, social support, and community participation have on health and wellbeing. As Aristotle observed, we are 'political animals,' able to fully flourish only in community. When we are deeply embedded in relationships, we tend to thrive; when we are isolated, the cost to our wellbeing is

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32 There is no official list of lament Psalms. But there are plenty that fall into this general category. Some are more individualistic in tone, (for example, 3, 5–7, 13, 17, 22, 25–28, 32, 38, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54–57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69–71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 140–43), while others are more communal (44, 74, 79, 80, 83, and 89).

33 I'm referring to the so-called "loneliness pandemic" that has captured the attention of recent social scientists. See "The Loneliness Pandemic: The psychology and social costs of isolation in everyday life" by Jacob Sweet. Harvard Magazine, January-February 2021. <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/12/feature-the-loneliness-pandemic>

considerable.”<sup>34</sup> The loneliness pandemic has been brewing in the Western world for centuries, going back to the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, Rene Descartes, and John Locke. Long before the most recent pandemic, there was already a lack of relational support for all people — Christians included.

The problem of loneliness also exists in the church. The Scriptures clearly teach that it is impossible to be a Christian alone. Those who believe in Jesus by the power of the Spirit inside of them are intimately and eternally united with all other believers who are similarly possessed by the same Spirit. And yet sometimes there is as much loneliness in the church as there is among unbelievers. The problem here is not only philosophical, but theological. In many and various ways the church has succumbed to the individualistic spirit of the age. Charles Arand was certainly correct when he referred to Lutherans as “ecclesiologicaly challenged.”<sup>35</sup>

Part of this challenge stems from the ways in which Christians have failed one another. Rather than being an authentic community of believers whose shared values and shared practices lead to genuine concern for one another’s well-being, the church often becomes a “mirage community.”<sup>36</sup> To outsiders it may look like a community, and it may describe itself as a community. But too often we fail to treat one another as we ought. This tragic reality can be found at every level, from the smallest congregation to the largest church body.

This is all to say that the Gathering has the opportunity to highlight and emphasize the corporate nature of the Christian faith and life. While we always speak to individuals about their own repentance and faith, it is increasingly important to explore the corporate aspect of calling to endure. At the very least, this will lead us to notice that Hebrews 12:1–3 includes no singular pronouns. It addresses both “we” and “you (plural).” Here again the long list of faithfulness endures in Hebrews 11 is helpful to recall. They all lived as part of God’s chosen community. Notice that, in his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism, Luther emphasized the corporate nature of the Spirit’s saving work. He refused to finish his sentence about individual salvation without also mentioning the community of believers:

“I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, *just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it* with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily *in this Christian church* the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—*mine and those of all believers*. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to *me and all believers in Christ* eternal life. This is most certainly true.”

## Two Senses of Endure

Earlier we noted that there are two different senses to the word “endure.” We focused mostly throughout this study on the first sense, which emphasizes patient suffering and resilience through difficulty. As we’ve

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34 “How We Can Rebuild Communities After the Pandemic” Psychology Today, December 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/human-flourishing/202112/how-we-can-rebuild-communities-after-the-pandemic>

35 Charles Arand, “What Are Ecclesiologicaly Challenged Lutherans To Do? Starting Points for a Lutheran Ecclesiology” *Concordia Journal*, 2008.

36 Community strategists Carrie Melissa Jones and Charles Vogl suggest that authentic community is more elusive than it may seem. Many groups aspire to be a community, and many groups call themselves a community, and many groups look like a community to outsiders. But beneath the surface lurks division, disengagement, or indifference. Jones and Vogl call such groups “mirage communities.” <https://www.charlesvogel.com/articles/mirage-community-it-looks-like-community-from-a-distance-its-not>



said at several points, this endurance is not passive, but active. Jesus endured in this way for us. And we endure by His Spirit.

But we should recognize that the other sense offers some potentially creative ways to think about and proclaim the gracious work and promises of God in Christ. Indeed, the possibility for our endurance rests entirely on the steadfast and enduring love of God.

### **The suffering we are called to endure**

The following list of passages is not exhaustive, but it provides a sampling of the ways in which the New Testament speak of enduring in the first sense of the word.

Matthew 10:22 (see also 24:13) – “The one who **endures** to the end will be saved.”

Luke 21:16–19 – “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your **endurance** you will gain your lives.”

Romans 5:3–5 – “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**, and **endurance** produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Romans 8:25 – “But if we hope for what we do not see, we **wait for it with patience.**”

Romans 12:12 – “Rejoice in hope, **be patient in tribulation**, be constant in prayer.”

Romans 15:4 – “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through **endurance** and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

2 Corinthians 1:6 – “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you **patiently endure** the same sufferings that we suffer”

Colossians 1:9–11 – “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all **endurance** and patience with joy

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (cf. 2 Thess. 1:4) – “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and **steadfastness** of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ

2 Thessalonians 3:5 – “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the **steadfastness** of Christ.”

1 Peter 2:20 – “But if when you do good and suffer for it you **endure**, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

James 1:12 – “Blessed is the man who **remains steadfast** under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

James 5:11 – “Behold, we consider those blessed who **remained steadfast**. You have heard of the **steadfastness** of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

### The love of God that endures

There are a few places in the New Testament where the biblical authors speak about good things that endure.

1 Corinthians 7:13 – “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, **endures** all things.”

John 8:35 – “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son **remains forever**.”

1 Peter 1:25 – “The Word of the Lord **remains forever**.”<sup>37</sup>

There are no single words in the Hebrew language that corresponds directly with the Greek *hupomeno* or the English “endure.” Instead, the Old Testament uses a host of terms that circle around the general concept.<sup>38</sup> The most familiar reference to something good that endures is the common refrain, “His steadfast love endures forever.” This phrase occurs most often in the Psalms, and most often in the Psalms in Psalm 136. While the idea is certainly there, we should note that there is actually no word “endure” in the Hebrew text for this phrase. Instead, it simply says “to eternity his steadfast love” (*le’olam hesedo*).

Two comments might be helpful here. First, the word for “steadfast love” is *hesed* in Hebrew. Tomes have been written about this significant term. Tim Saleska offers a helpful summary of what it entails: “For God’s people, *hesed* brings with it a history of *meaningfulness*. Stories of God’s covenant, his promises, the way he chose Israel, his loyalty to them, his saving acts on their behalf, and so on come to mind. It is translated in various ways in English because no one term is adequate. *Hesed* rolls together descriptions of God’s grace, mercy, compassion, patience, faithfulness, loyalty, and love.”<sup>39</sup> If *that* endures, we’re in good shape.

Second is the word *olam*, which literally means “long duration, antiquity, or futurity.” It is closely related (and often translated) to mean “forever or eternity.” You can’t get more lasting than that.

When we put them together (as Psalm 136 does over and over again, we find ourselves proclaiming with the people of God throughout the generations that the steadfast love of God (*hesed*) is eternal (*olam*). When that love is ours—and it is through faith in Jesus—this is really good news, indeed.

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37 In John 8 and 1 Peter the word is *meno* (“remains”) rather than *hupomeno* (“endures”). While the terms aren’t precisely the same, when combined with “forever,” the concept is similar.

38 They include *amad* (to stand, take a stand), *yashav* (to dwell, remain), *cum* (to arise, stand up), *hiyl* (to be strong, firm), *yacol* (to be able, have power, prevail), *cool* (to comprehend, contain), or simply, *haya* (to be). The point here is that the concept “endure” is more prevalent in the Old Testament than any single word.

39 Timothy Saleska, *Psalms 1–50*. Concordia Commentary Series (CPH, 2020), 183.

## Conclusion

If you're still reading this theological study, you have a glimpse of what it means to endure! (Hopefully it hasn't been *too* unpleasant.) Our goal has been to help you take seriously the current challenges young Christians are facing and equip you to serve them faithfully. Everyone who attends ENDURE in 2025 faces their own specific mash of joys and challenges, frustrations and celebrations, sufferings and comforts. The one constant in their struggle to endure is the enduring love of God in Christ. Paul speaks to both in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7:

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup>For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. <sup>6</sup>If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently **endure** the same sufferings that we suffer. <sup>7</sup>Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Or, to use the language from our theme verse, Hebrews 12:1–3:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him **endured** the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who **endured** from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

This good news of Jesus, the one who endured the cross and scorned its shame for us, gives us strength to whatever He sets before our young brothers and sisters (and us). So we trust, we long, we wait, we hope, we rejoice, we serve, and, together with all the people of God, we sing prayers like this:

While life's dark maze I tread,  
And griefs around me spread,  
Be thou my guide;  
Bid darkness turn to day,  
Wipe sorrows tears away,  
Nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

When ends life transient dream,  
When death's cold sullen stream  
Shall o'er me roll,  
Blest Savior then in love,  
Fear and distrust remove;  
O bear me safe above,  
A ransomed soul.<sup>40</sup>

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40 "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" LSB 702, v. 3-4