



When God opened our minds to His precious truths, we were filled with excitement with what we had discovered.

If you were like me, you couldn't wait to share them with family, friends, and coworkers. We couldn't understand why they couldn't "see" what we had. Often this got us into trouble. But, nonetheless, we charged out of the starter's block with the blinding speed of a sprinter. Sprinters run as fast and hard as they can for a short distance. But the Christian "race" cannot be run as a sprinter would; our "race" is a marathon. It takes a different kind of runner to compete in a marathon. Speed is secondary. Endurance is the key.

Many have come into God's church scorching the trail as a Kentucky Derby champion. They couldn't maintain that breakneck pace, and they broke down and fell by the wayside, while the steady, plodding Clydesdale stayed the course, enduring to the end of the race.

When we commit our lives to Jesus Christ and go into that watery grave of baptism, we have to be willing to endure unto the end. Jesus was very concerned that anyone contemplating this life-saving covenant count the cost before entering into this awesome obligation (see Luke 14:27-33). Earlier Jesus warned, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God"

Enduring to the End

(Luke 9:62).

We have to endure to the end. While we tend to think this means until His feet stand on the Mount of Olives, we cannot afford to do that. Thousands of our fellow firstfruits have already met their end—many of them had no idea of the very day of their "end." In our local congregation in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, alone, that has been just the case.

One of our worship leaders, shortly after services, died watching TV with his wife; our fellowship hostess passed away preparing for bed after coming home from her daughter's; another of our brethren died waiting in his car

while his wife shopped (only a few days after his retirement); and my mother had roast beef thawing on the stove on her last morning. That's why enduring to the end must be a daily, ongoing process—our top priority. We cannot know when that end is.

The Bible is rife with heroes who have endured to the end. Abraham patiently endured; Moses endured, fearing not Pharaoh; and Jesus Himself willingly endured the agonizing death of the cross. (See Hebrews 6:13-15; 11:24-27; 12:1-3.)

We must never forget that our eternal reward is contingent upon our enduring to the end. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). The rewards mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 are dependent on overcoming, or enduring.

Our endurance is the proof of our discipleship. Jesus said, "If you continue [endure] in my word, then you are my disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

In Mark 4, we have the parable of the sower of the seed, which teaches a powerful lesson on enduring to the end. In verses 3-8, Jesus tells of seed falling by the wayside and being devoured by birds; seed falling on stony ground where they couldn't take root; seed that fell among thorns and was choked out as they grew; and seed that fell on good ground and bore much fruit.

Jesus then gets a little testy with His disciples for not understanding the parable, but goes on to explain in verses 14-20.

The seed is the gospel. The seed by the wayside is heard and understood, but Satan swoops in like the birds of prey and devours it. The word *devour* is quite apt, as it is the same word Peter uses in describing Satan as a roaring lion seeking whom he may *devour* (1 Peter 5:8). The evil one will use any person, any device, whether subtle or obvious, to devour, distort, and twist the precious Word of God and His church. Satan uses people to sow discord and discourage little ones in the faith, and he is often successful in devouring seed, causing the newly called not to endure to the end.

The seed on stony ground are like those we talked about earlier. They begin with the speed of a sleek stallion, but lack the endurance of a plodder. As a minister

in God's church, I have encountered many who wanted to be baptized "yesterday," but only stayed a short while. Many were merely impressed by a talented speaker who said some things they agreed with; some recognized doctrines that were in sync with theirs; others were simply interested only in being "someone" within the organization. Their foundation was on something other than the Rock which is Christ, and His Word, the Holy Bible. So when a doctrine came under review, when a human leader stumbled or erred, when their "talents" weren't adequately recognized and rewarded, they stopped enduring.

The seed which grew up did well for a while and then was choked out by thorns. Jesus said they are deceived by the world's riches and they become unfruitful. The world offers a dizzying array of toys and goodies. And it seems as if the evil and the untoward get all the breaks, get away with all their indiscretions, never are held accountable. Satan works very deftly to spotlight all this. "If I wasn't tithing, I could have that big Lincoln, Caddy, or SUV." "If I worked a little overtime on Saturday, that pleasure boat would be within reach." Whatever it is that appeals to us. And what about our time? Surfing the Net, computer games, movies, and TV are a lot more enticing than prayer and Bible study. "Can't miss the big game. They're only having a videotape this week, and watching baseball is resting and relaxing on the Sabbath." Satan will throw down obstacle after obstacle in our paths until Sabbath services, prayer, and study slip to fourth, fifth, tenth on our priority schedule. If we recognize anything here, it's time to go out and weed the garden, pull out the thorns and thistles that are choking the plant before it's too late.

Then there's the seed that fell on good ground. Seed firmly rooted in the truth of God, nurtured by the living water of the Word, growing and bearing much good fruit. That's where we all want to be, rooted solidly, safe from the birds of prey, free of thorns, building righteous character, growing in grace and knowledge, constant and enduring in prayer and study.

Let us always remember the admonishing words of Jesus in Matthew 20:16: "for many are called but few chosen." And those that are chosen are they that endure unto the end. **AG**

