



When Tested

Kicking It Off

What's the longest you've ever stuck with something challenging (hobby, exercise routine, project, etc.) and what kept you going?

Read

James 1:12-15

Summary

When I first started to run, it was absolutely miserable. Everything hurts, you can't breathe, and you wonder why anyone would do this to themselves. But then something weird happens, if you stick with it long enough, you actually start to enjoy it. Not because it gets easier, exactly, but because you learn what you're doing and why you're doing it. Following Jesus is kind of like that. It's not always easy, in fact, it's often really hard, but there's something deeply satisfying about it when you understand what's actually happening. The thing is, we're not sprinting here. We're running a marathon, and marathons are all about endurance, not speed.

Here's what I've learned, when life is good, it's easy to say God is good. The sun's shining, everything's working out, and faith feels natural. But when things get tough, when you lose your job, when relationships fall apart, when you're dealing with real pain, that's when you discover what your faith is really made of. And surprisingly, that's when worship becomes something deeper. It's one thing to thank God when life's great. It's something else entirely to trust Him when everything's falling apart.

Imagine you've got a jar filled with sand and water. When it sits still, the water on top looks crystal clear. But shake that jar, and suddenly all the dirt mixes up and clouds everything. That's what trials do to us. God doesn't put the dirt in there, but He does shake things up sometimes to show us what's really inside. Our first instinct is to try to fix it ourselves, to filter out all the mess on our own. But that's missing the point. The shaking isn't meant to destroy us; it's meant to show us that we need help.

Life with Jesus isn't a solo race where you're trying to keep up with Him. It's more like a three-legged race where you're tied together. Your job isn't to run faster or be

stronger. Your job is just to hold on tight and let Him set the pace. When things get hard, don't let go, hold on tighter.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. When life is going well, we naturally praise God, but trials reveal a different depth of worship. How has a difficult season in your life changed the way you relate to God?
3. We often try to fix our problems through our own strength rather than surrendering them to God. What area of your life are you currently trying to "clean up" on your own instead of asking for God's help?
4. The things that make us feel strong, like our anger or pride, can actually be impurities God wants to remove. What characteristic or defense mechanism do you find hardest to let go of, even though you know it's not helping your spiritual growth?
5. Our desires reveal what we truly value and pursuing anything above God ultimately leads to disappointment. What competes most for your attention and affection when God is calling you to focus on Him?
6. Spiritual endurance develops through consistent daily choices rather than dramatic moments. What small, sustainable practice could you begin this week to strengthen your ability to persevere in faith?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Following Jesus is not easy, but it's enjoyable. It's the best. Following Jesus requires discipline. You can follow Jesus without any discipline, yes, but it will be ineffective. It won't be as healthy."

"When it's good and we worship God, the equation is a very simple one. It's good, God's good. The thing about going through trials: it's bad, but God's good. It's another layer of worship that you can't get if you're only in the good."

"God putting you through tests is to shake this jar. And as this jar shakes, the sand and dirt and all those things begin to mix up with the top. And it's no longer this clean, pure water on top and dirty dirt on the bottom. It's all mixed together. In many ways, God will

shake your life, but God did not put the dirt in there. And don't you dare say that God put the dirt in there."

"You might think this race is like a regular foot race. It's actually a three-legged race. Your partner is Jesus. And I think too many times you're trying to run alongside of him. Nope. Not going to work. He's faster. He's better. He's more holy than you. Your job: cling on for dear life to him."

Sermon Notes**James 1:12-15**

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. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Outline

1. I. Trials Transform Work into Worship (James 1:12)
 - a. A. The Crown of Life
 - i. Athletic wreath for race winners, not royal crown
 - ii. Reward for those who remain steadfast under trial
 - iii. Early church faced physical persecution; we face psychological/social trials
 - iv. Endurance transforms our work into worship
 - b. B. Good Times vs. Trials in Worship
 - i. Good times: Simple equation (life is good, God is good)
 - ii. Trials: Complex equation (life is hard, but God is still good)
 - iii. Trials create deeper, more resilient worship
 - iv. Lament as worship: bringing pain to God respectfully
 - v. Don't manufacture struggles or feel guilty during good times
 - c. C. Contentment as Worship (Philippians 4:11-13)
 - i. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me"
 - ii. Not victory as we define it, but contentment in all circumstances
 - iii. Whether brought low or high, poor or rich, God is still good
 - iv. Power to worship in any situation through Christ's strength
 - d. D. Rejoicing in Trials (1 Peter 1:6-7)
 - i. Faith tested like gold through fire
 - ii. Work equals worship equals rejoicing
 - iii. Perseverance and steadfastness are forms of worship
 - iv. Has your faith been producing worship in your life?
2. II. Temptation Tests Our Worship (James 1:13-14)
 - a. A. The Jar Illustration
 - i. Jar with sand and water: appears clean when settled
 - ii. God shakes the jar to reveal hidden sediment
 - iii. God tests but doesn't tempt; temptation comes from our own desires
 - iv. Same Greek word for "tested" and "tempted" creates intentional complexity
 - b. B. Our Response to Testing
 - i. Temptation: thinking "I can fix this myself"
 - ii. God shakes to reveal sin so we cry out to Him
 - iii. We wrongly blame God for stirring up our junk
 - iv. We turn to worldly solutions for anxiety, depression, anger
 - c. C. The Gold Refining Process
 - i. Pure gold is soft; impurities make it stronger but less valuable
 - ii. God removes our "strengthening" impurities (anger, pride, greed)
 - iii. We resist because these sins feel like strength and defense
 - iv. We want to keep the dross that makes us feel powerful
 - d. D. Desire's Progression (James 1:15)

- i. Desire conceives and gives birth to sin
- ii. Sin fully grown brings forth death
- iii. Problem isn't things themselves but desire for them above God
- iv. Example: watching football vs. responding to God's call

3. III. The Faith-Works Dynamic in Trials (James 1:15 and broader context)

- a. A. Paul's Inner Struggle (Romans 7:15-25)
 - i. "Wretched man that I am"
 - ii. War between flesh and spirit
 - iii. Sinful flesh makes us feel strong but wars against God
 - iv. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ for deliverance
- b. B. Dead Works vs. Living Worship (Romans 12:1)
 - i. Bible study without Spirit is dead work
 - ii. Spirit-led activities become genuine worship
 - iii. Present bodies as living sacrifice with all impurities
 - iv. Not cleaning ourselves up first, but offering all to God
 - v. Raising children, work, study can all be worship when Spirit-led
- c. C. The Three-Legged Race Image
 - i. Not running alongside Jesus but tied to Him
 - ii. Our leg attached to His, completely dependent
 - iii. Others may have different systems, but we win by clinging
 - iv. Crown of life given only to winners
 - v. Don't let go of Jesus to cling to worldly things
- d. D. Faith Produces Desire for Christ
 - i. How much do you desire Jesus throughout your day?
 - ii. Heaven is being with Jesus 24/7
 - iii. Currently dealing with competing desires due to sin
 - iv. Mature Christians recognize ongoing need for grace

Notes

There's something remarkable about discovering you've become a runner when you never thought you would be. Not long ago, the very idea of running seemed foreign, even miserable. Running appeared to be nothing more than exhaustion and pain, something that other people inexplicably enjoyed while the rest of us looked on in bewilderment. Yet here's the surprising truth: what once seemed like pure suffering has transformed into genuine joy. The transformation didn't happen overnight, and it certainly wasn't easy, but it reveals something essential about the nature of endurance, both in running and in faith. When someone first suggested running a race, not just casual jogging but an actual event with a starting line and a finish, everything changed. There's something fundamentally different about training for a specific goal versus aimless exercise. When you're preparing for a marathon, every run has purpose. The training isn't primarily about speed or intensity; instead, it becomes about learning the countless small lessons that enable endurance. You learn about proper fueling and hydration. You discover which shoes work and which ones cause problems. You understand how to wake up early and get on the road even when every fiber of your being wants to stay in bed. The training teaches you that endurance isn't about being perpetually exhausted; it's about developing the capacity to continue. This physical journey mirrors a spiritual reality. Following Jesus shares striking parallels with distance running. Both require discipline, both challenge our comfort zones, and both offer rewards that far exceed the difficulties involved. Yet there's a crucial distinction: while running remains optional, a hobby we can abandon when our bodies fail us, following Jesus represents something eternal and essential. There will never be a day when we cannot follow Christ. This relationship extends beyond physical limitations, beyond mortality itself, into eternity. James understood this connection between physical and spiritual endurance when he wrote, "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." The crown he mentions isn't a royal diadem but rather the victor's wreath, the prize given to race winners in ancient athletic competitions. James deliberately employs this athletic metaphor to help us understand that faith isn't passive; it's an active pursuit requiring endurance and steadfastness.

Understanding endurance in faith requires recognizing that we're not running a sprint but a marathon. The race of faith measures not speed but staying power. This fundamentally changes how we approach our spiritual training and daily practice. Just as marathon training involves mostly steady, sustainable efforts rather than constant high intensity work, spiritual endurance develops through consistent, faithful practice rather than sporadic bursts of religious fervor. The early church, to whom James wrote,

faced literal trials of persecution and death. While many of us today face different kinds of trials, psychological, social, or cultural rather than physical persecution, the principle remains unchanged. Trials test our faith's genuineness, revealing whether our commitment to Christ can withstand pressure or merely exists as a fair weather friendship. Consider how good times and difficult times differently shape our faith. When life flows smoothly, when we're metaphorically running alongside deer in the morning sun, worshiping God feels natural and easy. The equation seems simple: life is good, therefore God is good. We praise Him readily because His goodness aligns with our circumstances. Yet this represents only one dimension of worship. Trials introduce a different dynamic entirely. When storms arrive, when our feet hurt, when we want nothing more than to quit, we face a more complex equation: life is hard, but God remains good. This creates a deeper, more resilient form of worship that acknowledges difficulty while maintaining faith in God's character. This isn't about manufacturing struggles or feeling guilty during good times. Rather, it's about recognizing that trials, when they inevitably come, offer unique opportunities for spiritual growth.

God's testing serves a specific purpose that we must understand correctly. Picture a large glass jar filled partially with sand and topped with clear water. Left undisturbed, the contents separate neatly: clean water above, sediment below. This represents how we often view ourselves, especially during good times. We see the clear water on top and convince ourselves we're essentially pure, with perhaps just a bit of settled impurity we've successfully managed. But God shakes the jar. When He does, all that hidden sediment swirls up, clouding the water entirely. Suddenly, what appeared mostly clean reveals itself as thoroughly mixed with impurity. This shaking isn't arbitrary cruelty; it's revelation. God doesn't put the dirt in our jar, but He does reveal what's already there, what we've been hiding even from ourselves. The temptation, when our jar gets shaken and our impurities become visible, is to think we can fix it ourselves. We want to filter out the sand, to clean up our own mess through sheer willpower and determination. This represents a fundamental misunderstanding of both the problem and the solution. The test isn't whether we can clean ourselves up; it's whether we'll recognize our inability to do so and turn to the only One who can truly purify us. James warns against a dangerous confusion: "Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." The Greek word here serves double duty, meaning both "tested" and "tempted," creating an intentional complexity. God does test us, shaking our lives to reveal what's within, but He doesn't tempt us toward evil. The temptation comes from our own desires, from the sediment within us that wants to handle everything independently rather than surrendering to God's purifying work.

The purification process resembles gold refinement, though not quite as we might imagine. Pure gold, surprisingly, is soft and malleable. The impurities mixed with gold actually make it stronger and more durable. When refiners heat gold, they separate out these strengthening impurities to create something more valuable despite being technically weaker. This counterintuitive truth applies directly to our spiritual lives. The very things that make us feel strong, our anger that defends us, our pride that protects us, our greed that advances our careers, these impurities might make us harder, but they don't make us more valuable. God's refining process involves removing these false strengths, these defense mechanisms we've relied upon. We resist because we fear weakness. We want to keep a little rage for when people wrong us, a little pride to maintain our position, a little greed to ensure our success. Yet God persistently works to remove these impurities, not to weaken us but to make us more like Christ. The apostle Paul understood this internal struggle intimately. He wrote about the war within himself, doing what he didn't want to do, failing to do what he knew was right. Even Paul, as spiritually mature as he was, recognized the ongoing battle between his flesh and his spirit. He called himself a "wretched man" while simultaneously thanking God for deliverance through Jesus Christ. This honest self assessment doesn't diminish Paul's faith; it demonstrates its maturity. The most mature Christians aren't those who claim to have conquered all sin but those who recognize their ongoing need for God's grace and purifying work. They understand that strength in God's kingdom often looks like weakness in the world's eyes.

At the heart of our struggle lies the question of desire. If we have faith in Christ, we desire Christ. The depth of our faith correlates directly with the intensity of our desire for Him. This isn't meant to induce guilt but to promote honest self reflection. How much of our day do we genuinely want to spend in God's presence? How often do our desires drift toward other things? James explains the progression clearly: "Desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." The problem isn't necessarily the things themselves but our desire for them above God. Watching a football game isn't inherently sinful, but choosing the game over God's calling in that moment reveals misplaced desire. Every activity, every pursuit, every relationship must be held with open hands, ready to be released if God calls us elsewhere. This doesn't mean abandoning all earthly pleasures or relationships. It means holding them properly, enjoying them as gifts while maintaining our primary allegiance to Christ. When God tests our desires by shaking our circumstances, He reveals where our true loyalties lie. Do we cling to our comforts, our securities, our identities? Or do we cling to Him?

Understanding how our work becomes worship revolutionizes our approach to faith. Many assume that spiritual work means Bible study, memorization, prayer, and religious activities. But these activities, performed in our own strength without the Spirit's leading, remain dead works. They might appear spiritual but lack the life that comes from genuine connection with God. True spiritual work occurs when the Spirit leads us in these activities, transforming routine religious practice into genuine worship. Reading the Bible becomes not merely absorbing ancient text but hearing God speak to our souls. Prayer shifts from religious obligation to real relationship. Even everyday activities like raising children or pursuing our careers can become acts of worship when performed in reliance on God's strength rather than our own. Paul captures this beautifully: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." We offer ourselves not after we've cleaned up, not after we've removed all our impurities, but as we are, trusting God to do the purifying work we cannot accomplish ourselves. This living sacrifice means giving God everything, the good and bad, the pure and impure, the strength and weakness, allowing Him to transform us into something acceptable for worship.

Perhaps the most helpful image for understanding our journey of faith is that of a three legged race. We're not running alongside Jesus, trying to match His pace with our own strength. We're tied to Him, our leg bound to His, completely dependent on His movement for our progress. Too often we try to run independently, occasionally checking to ensure Jesus is still nearby. But that's not how this race works. Success in this race requires clinging to Jesus, holding on for dear life as He carries us forward. Others might develop seemingly sophisticated strategies for running their own races, but we know the secret: we win by depending entirely on Christ. The crown of life isn't awarded to those who run fastest or look most impressive; it goes to those who finish, and we finish only by maintaining our grip on Jesus. This requires endurance of a particular kind, the endurance to keep holding on when the race gets difficult, when the path seems unclear, when we'd rather let go and try our own way. We must cling to Him in sunshine and storm, in triumph and trial, in clarity and confusion. Our role isn't to run the race but to maintain our connection to the One who runs it for us and with us.

Developing endurance in faith means embracing both the journey and the destination. Like training for a marathon, it involves daily decisions that seem small but accumulate into transformation. It means waking up spiritually even when we don't feel like it, maintaining disciplines that feed our souls, and consistently choosing worship over complaint when trials shake our lives. This endurance doesn't develop overnight. Just as no one goes from couch to marathon without months of preparation, spiritual endurance grows gradually through consistent practice. We learn to recognize God's testing as

refinement rather than punishment. We develop the ability to worship in difficulty, not just ease. We practice releasing our grip on earthly securities while tightening our hold on Christ. The beautiful paradox of this race is that our weakness becomes the very thing that qualifies us to run it. We don't need to be spiritual athletes; we need to acknowledge our inability and depend on Christ's strength. Our failings don't disqualify us; they drive us to deeper dependence. Our struggles don't indicate failure; they provide opportunities for God to demonstrate His faithfulness. Following Jesus with endurance means accepting that the path won't always be easy, but it will always be good. It means understanding that trials serve purposes we might not immediately grasp but can trust are for our benefit. It means learning to find joy not in the absence of difficulty but in the presence of Christ through difficulty. The race continues, and we keep running, or rather, we keep holding on as Christ runs with us and for us. We press forward not in our own strength but in His, not toward our own goals but toward His purposes, not for our own glory but for His. And at the end, when we cross that eternal finish line still clinging to Christ, we'll receive the crown of life, not as wages earned but as the gift promised to all who love Him and endure in that love regardless of circumstances.

This is the race of faith: not a sprint of momentary enthusiasm but a marathon of sustained dependence, not a test of our strength but a demonstration of His, not a solitary struggle but a shared journey with the One who has already secured our victory. We run by clinging, we win by depending, and we endure by continuously choosing to trust the One who carries us home.

Blog

As many of you know, I've caught the running bug, and ran the Seattle Marathon last year. I'm currently in the thick of training for the Portland Marathon right now. Marathon training has taught me so many lessons, but in a nutshell endurance training has taught me that in order to go far you must learn to slow down, eat enough, and train consistently. There's something special about mile twenty of a marathon. Your glycogen stores are depleted. Every muscle fiber screams for rest. The finish line exists somewhere beyond the horizon, invisible but promised. In that moment, finishing isn't about speed or strength. It's about something deeper. It's about trusting your training, believing in the process, and taking one more step when everything in you wants to stop.

James understood this kind of endurance. When he writes about perseverance under trial in James 1:12-15, he's not talking about a sprint. He's describing the long, steady faithfulness that characterizes genuine faith. The blessed person, James tells us, is the one who perseveres under trial. Not the one who avoids it. Not the one who conquers it quickly. The one who endures. The Greek word James uses for "perseveres" is *hypomeno*, which literally means "to remain under." Picture someone carrying a heavy load up a mountain trail. They don't throw off the weight. They don't run ahead recklessly. They remain under it, steady and determined, one step at a time. That's the image James paints of faithful endurance.

But here's where we often get confused. We think the work of faith means we're supposed to muscle through trials with our own strength. We imagine God standing at the finish line, arms crossed, waiting to see if we're tough enough to make it. That's not the gospel. The work of faith during trials is actually the work of waiting on God's power. We're not proving our strength to God. We're learning to trust His strength in our weakness. James promises something for those who persevere: "having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." Notice the progression. Perseverance leads to being tested and approved (the Greek word *dokimos* means something proven genuine, like metal refined by fire). This approval leads to receiving the crown of life. But look at how James ends verse 12, because it changes everything. This crown is promised to "those who love him."

Love is the secret ingredient. We don't endure trials to earn God's love. We endure because we already love Him. Love sustains us when our strength fails. Love keeps us faithful when the path seems impossible. A spouse sits by a hospital bed through long nights because of love. A parent works multiple jobs to provide for their children because of love. We persevere under trial because we love the One who first loved us.

Now James takes a sharp turn in verse 13, and we need to pay attention. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil,

nor does he tempt anyone." Wait, didn't James just say God tests us through trials? Yes, but testing and tempting are fundamentally different, even though English uses similar words for both. Think of it this way. A good coach puts athletes through grueling training. The purpose? To make them stronger, faster, more capable. Every drill, every exhausting practice session has a constructive purpose. That's testing. But imagine someone who secretly hopes the athlete will fail, who sets traps designed to cause injury, who whispers in the athlete's ear that they should just quit. That's tempting. God is the coach who trains us through trials. But He never, ever tempts us toward evil.

This distinction matters enormously for how we understand our struggles. When you're facing a difficult season at work, when your marriage hits rough waters, when health problems arise, God isn't setting you up to fail. He's not dangling temptation in front of you to see if you'll bite. These trials come because we live in a broken world, and God uses them to strengthen our faith. But the temptation to sin in response to these trials? That comes from somewhere else entirely.

James pulls no punches in verse 14: "but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed." The language here is visceral. "Dragged away" translates a Greek fishing term that describes a fish being lured from safety by bait. "Enticed" means to be trapped or caught. James paints a picture of our own desires acting like a hidden hook, pulling us away from God's path. This is humbling, isn't it? We want to blame someone else for our temptations. The devil made me do it. My circumstances forced my hand. My coworker pushed me too far. James says no, look inside. Your own desires are the problem. When trials come, they don't create new sins in us. They reveal what's already there, like squeezing a sponge shows what it's been soaking in.

Consider how this plays out practically. You lose your job (that's a trial). The temptation to despair, to become bitter, to compromise your integrity for quick cash, those temptations arise from desires already within you: the desire for security, for control, for comfort at any cost. God allowed the trial for your growth. But He's not the source of the temptation to sin in response to it. Or think about relationship conflicts. Your spouse disappoints you (a trial every marriage faces). The temptation to withdraw emotionally, to seek comfort elsewhere, to nurse resentment, these don't come from God. They bubble up from our own wounded pride, our demand to be treated better, our unwillingness to forgive. The trial tests us, but our own desires tempt us.

James then shows us where unchecked temptation leads, and it's not pretty. "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Notice the birthing metaphor. Desire conceives. Sin is born. Death results. It's a genealogy of destruction, and it starts with entertaining wrong desires when trials come.

We see this pattern throughout Scripture. Eve saw the fruit was good for food and pleasing to the eyes (desire), she took and ate (sin), and death entered the world (death). David saw Bathsheba bathing (desire), committed adultery and murder (sin), and brought death to his household (death). The pattern repeats endlessly when we give in to temptation instead of persevering through trials. But there's another pattern available to us, and James has been pointing to it all along. Trial produces perseverance.

Perseverance produces proven character. Proven character receives the crown of life. This is the pattern of faith, and it's the exact opposite of the pattern of temptation.

Here's what makes this so practical for us. Every day, we face situations that test our faith. The difficult colleague who seems determined to undermine you. The chronic illness that won't improve despite prayers. The financial pressure that never seems to ease. The child who's walking away from faith. These are trials, and they're real, and they're hard.

In each of these situations, we face a choice. We can recognize the trial as an opportunity for growth, a chance to deepen our dependence on God, a training ground for stronger faith. Or we can listen to the voice of temptation that says God doesn't care, that says we deserve better, that says we should take matters into our own hands.

The difference between testing and tempting often comes down to the story we tell ourselves about what's happening. Testing says, "This is hard, but God is using it for good." Tempting says, "This is unfair, and you need to fix it yourself." Testing drives us toward God. Tempting pulls us away from Him. We need to be honest about something. Perseverance is exhausting. There's a reason James calls those who persevere "blessed" rather than "happy." Blessing in the biblical sense isn't about feeling good. It's about being in the right position relative to God, even when that position involves suffering. Jesus called the persecuted blessed. He called those who mourn blessed. Blessing is about God's favor resting on us, not about our circumstances being favorable.

This understanding transforms how we view our trials. We're not trying to get through them as quickly as possible. We're learning to remain under them faithfully, trusting that God is doing something in us that couldn't happen any other way. The runner at mile twenty doesn't sprint. They settle into a sustainable pace and trust the process.

But (and this is crucial) our perseverance isn't powered by our own determination. Remember how James ends verse 12? The crown of life is promised to those who love God. Our perseverance flows from our love for Him, and our love for Him flows from His love for us. We can endure because He endured the cross for us. We can remain faithful because He remains faithful to us.

This reminds me of Jesus in Gethsemane. He faced the ultimate trial, knowing the cross awaited Him. He could have called down angels. He could have walked away. The temptation was real (the devil had offered Him shortcuts to glory throughout His

ministry). But Jesus persevered. Why? "For the joy set before him," Hebrews tells us. Love for the Father and love for us kept Him on the path to the cross.

His perseverance becomes the model and the power for ours. When we're tempted to give up, we remember that He didn't give up on us. When we're drawn toward sin, we remember that He died to free us from sin's power. When the trial seems unbearable, we remember that He bore our sins on the tree. We're not alone in our trials. We're not dependent on our own strength. We're not trying to impress God with our endurance. We're learning to wait on His power, to trust His purposes, to believe that He who began a good work in us will complete it.

When you face your next trial (and you will), remember that God isn't tempting you. He's training you. The temptation to sin comes from within, from desires that want immediate relief instead of lasting growth. Recognize the source of temptation honestly. Don't blame God, don't blame others, acknowledge the desires within you that pull you away from faithfulness. Then make the choice to persevere, not in your own strength but in dependence on God. Perseverance isn't about gritting your teeth and pushing through. It's about continuing to trust God when trust feels impossible. It's about taking the next step of obedience when you can't see the path ahead. It's about remaining under the weight of the trial while believing God will provide the strength to bear it.

The crown of life awaits those who persevere. Not because they earned it through their endurance, but because their endurance proved their love for the One who promises it. Every trial becomes an opportunity to demonstrate that love. Every temptation resisted declares that God is worth more than temporary relief.

We're in this together, fellow runners. The path is long, and sometimes it's brutal. Mile twenty will come for all of us, probably many times over. But we don't run alone. We run with others who understand the struggle. We run with the power of the Spirit. We run with our eyes fixed on Jesus, who endured the cross and now sits at the right hand of the throne of God. So when you're tested (not if, but when), remember that the work of faith isn't about proving your strength. It's about waiting on God's strength. It's about trusting that He who called you is faithful. It's about believing that trials are transforming your work into worship, one faithful step at a time.