

ENDURANCE

I hope you all had a great celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior. Here we are at the end of 2025.

We made it. I am proud of you all for enduring and thriving in 2025.

It is easy to look at all of the failures and struggles you encountered over the last year, but now is a good time to reflect on all the situations God showed up in.

We can take time to be grateful, if only just for being here healthy enough to make it to church!

We are going to spend today talking about spiritual endurance.

Last September I took on a challenge that sounds crazy, and you are not wrong for thinking it was crazy. Let me tell you why I did it though before you judge too hard.

Paul says in Romans 5: 3 “We can rejoice too, when we run in to problems and trials, for we know they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”

I have made a goal in my life several years ago to fortify my mind, body, and spirit so that I can be the most effective I can be for the kingdom of God.

Before you say that is boastful, hear me out. I found that there were many things that could affect me and my walk with Christ.

I struggled with fear of man, fear of failure, shame, guilt, and could easily be swayed by people because of the need to seek affirmation from them.

This really bothered me, because I knew who I wanted to be. I wanted to be a loving, caring and supportive brother and sister to my family and to you all.

So I set out on a journey to build resilience to these things that so easily took me off course.

Unfortunately, this meant facing these things head on, and actually placing myself in situations that were difficult in order to learn.

I completely believe that seeking a life of comfort and avoiding challenges is the most unhealthy thing we can do both spiritually and physically. God did not call us to a life of comfort.

I am going to put a Disclaimer out now that this message may sting a little, but I promise if you put it in to practice you will love the results later on.

So on this journey the opportunity came up to join some amazing people on a 50 mile ruck. This was from Gaylord to Cheboygan.

The rules were simple: Show up, carry some amount of weight in a backpack, and don't whine.

The event started at 3PM, and the rule was to finish in 24 hours. This meant the majority of the ruck would have to be completed in darkness through the night.

I like sleep, I don't stay up late, and I certainly do not enjoy walking with a bunch of weight on my back. So this sounded perfect!

In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul says "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."

In Romans 12:2 He also says “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Paul understood that training our mind and body is instrumental in living out our calling as believers. So I agreed with this as well and set off to train for this deal.

1. Training:

As with many difficult situations we can find ourselves in, training before being in the situation is critical.

We need to try to anticipate what that situation will be like, and train our mind and body to handle it.

I spent some time weekly walking as far as I had time to in order to get a feel for where my weaknesses were. I found that some gear I thought would help, actually would make things worse.

I found that wisdom from others who had completed similar things was crucial. Remember this as we think of our spiritual walk – don’t walk it alone!

I realized that little problems at the beginning of my walk could turn into major problems later on. This is so much like the little sins we don’t deal with that can become major problems when things get tough.

I realized moleskin bandages for blisters would be my best friend. I prepared for my feet to get blisters, because no matter how much you train this distance will cause blisters.

As we go through our Christian walk, we will get injured by people and situations, but we need to be ready for that.

People will say and do things that hurt you. Situations can cause blisters. That is why we need spiritual moleskin! Which brings me to my next point.

2. Training our mind and thoughts.

This is actually more important than the physical training from my experience, and I will explain.

I tried to anticipate what thoughts and temptations to quit would feel like when it got tough.

I spent time imagining myself in that situation with the blisters, and feeling tired at 3 AM, and practiced correcting my thoughts to Christ, who strengthens me. That was my mantra.

I would practice saying the verse from Isaiah 40:31 “But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint.”

These were spiritual bullets to fire at the thoughts coming in about quitting or being too tired to go on.

I did not go in naive thinking that I will have a good attitude and feel good the entire time. I knew that at some point I would be suffering.

I pictured myself finishing the event, and the feeling of accomplishment.

Just like we should picture ourselves standing in the face of criticism for our beliefs, and then later standing face to face with Jesus, hearing “WELL DONE MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!

We have to get that mental image in order to know what we are aiming for!

We shouldn't wait until we are in battle to put on the armor of God. We also need to make sure it is fitted on us correctly!

The helmet of salvation referenced in Ephesians 6 will work to protect our mind, but we must make sure it is on correctly so that we can see.

Sometimes if we don't train with our helmet on, we can be blinded by just walking in salvation but missing the opportunity to see the enemy moving around.

If our helmet is on but accidentally backwards or loose fitting, we will be protected, but will be sitting there taking arrow after arrow, not knowing where it is coming from.

That is why we train our minds before we are in the battle. Again, this was the most important training for when the suffering started.

3. The walk

Cody and I (Cody did this with me and also finished, and to be honest this was his idea to join lol), showed up ready to go a little before 3.

We had carefully planned what we would pack in the backpack including some food, and some supplies in case we couldn't go forward including a tent and sleeping bags.

As we discussed on the drive, we decided to ditch the tent, meaning we had no real choice but to finish.

Early sailors and voyagers would often burn their ships when they landed on new land, meaning they had to figure out how to survive.

There was no going back.

Cody and I decided to burn the ships, and remove the easy option of quitting and camping out until Katie and Carrie could come get us.

Funny story, I will never ever ask them to come rescue me if I can't complete a challenge again. It happened once on a bike ride, and I have yet to stop hearing "Need a ride Lance?" from Carrie.

Ok back to a serious note. Removing unnecessary weight from our packs proved to be one of the best decisions we made. The 25 lbs that we did carry felt like 300 by the end. I can't imagine carrying more.

Don't carry too much with you. Strengthen your faith and remove unnecessary spiritual weight, so that when you are tired it will not overwhelm you. Shed the guilt, shame, self preservation, and unforgiveness that will only slow you down and may cause you to not finish the race that God has for you.

So we set off, watching our pace and feeling good. It was a sunny afternoon, and things were going well.

I remember thinking "This is so cool." Everyone was in good spirits, and calculating what time we would finish if we kept the pace.

We made it to the first stop after 10 miles and only spent about 10 minutes refilling water bottles and getting a quick snack. WE were eager to keep going, having put 10 miles behind us.

This was the point where it was easy to get over confident.

It reminded me of how Jesus describes the seeds in Matthew 13:5 “Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots they died.”

Without deep roots spiritually, we can go into a situation over confident, but get in over our head because our roots in Jesus aren’t deep.

Again, this goes back to preparation of growing our roots deep in with Christ, and having wisdom to not get over confident.

The second stop was 20 miles in, and it was pretty much dark at this point.

Some suffering had started, and words started being spoken that eventually would lead to people dropping out.

Some already had blisters. They were saying things like “I don’t know if I can go another 30 miles.” I don’t know if my feet will hold up. If I drop out now I can still get home and get a good night’s sleep.

These were actually words that had a major impact.

James 3:3 says “We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in it’s mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set of fire by hell itself.”

We observed that those who started speaking these things dropped out within a couple miles. Still a great accomplishment, however they let their words influence their ability to finish strong.

How many of us inadvertently talk about how hard a situation is, or something like “How am I going to get through this?” When we succumb to those thoughts, it makes the battle so much harder.

That is why we must practice and prepare what we do with those thoughts before they show up.

We need to reject them, because we are capable of so much more than what we think sometimes.

Cody and I applied some moleskin to our feet where blisters were starting to show up. This was good because they were not bad yet, but again little problems early could lead to big problems later.

We pushed on to mile 30, and at this point it was late, dark, and the fun and thrill had vanished.

There were 3 of us walking together at this point, and a group 5 or so up ahead of us just a touch, and several behind us.

We discussed how this was going to be the hardest part. We discussed how the 30-40 mile range was going to be the ultimate test.

Proverbs 27:17 says “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.”

We spoke life, strength, and strategy to get through the hard part. Not once did we discuss the uncertainty of making it through.

We discussed the strategy to get through, and how far we had come.

Hold on to those crazy faith friends! There is strength in numbers when you are heading to a common goal!

We all had a personal battle going on, and this is where I meditated on the verses above.

I felt God's presence to persevere and encourage the others, even though it was dark and difficult out.

We made it to mile 36, and took a break. This area didn't have much other than a couple benches, so we didn't stay long.

It was now about 3 AM, and I had blisters, my legs and shoulders were hurting pretty bad, but we pressed on.

I know Cody and the others were feeling the same, but we didn't talk about it.

I am pretty sure we entered an alternate dimension at this point. What felt like hours was only about a quarter mile.

My watch wasn't working correctly so after what seemed like a reasonable time I would ask, where are we at? The answer was discouraging...

The goal was to make it to 40 miles, but this 36-40 mile range felt like forever.

It was dark, and had begun to rain.

Because of the mental prep we did, we knew this is where the rubber meets the road.

It would have been easy to say "Why are you making this harder God?"

It would have been easy to say "Well the rain was out of our control, so lets just pack it up, find somewhere to get out of the rain, and go home."

This struggle was a blessing to me. Here is why.

In the darkest hour, when my body felt like it couldn't take one more step, I heard the Holy Spirit encouraging me.

This will fortify you, and when you make it through, this will be something you can fall back on in future tough times.

IT is worth it, let me develop you in this time where your body doesn't think it can go on.

I heard "The sun will rise again, you just have to endure. I am working on your endurance and character.

It sounds crazy, but I think all of us were somewhat hallucinating. In all seriousness I did feel the presence of the Holy spirit.

This was the time that most people dropped out. The darkest hour, body hurting, and the lure to go get comfortable was too much to bear.

I am not judging them at all, and if I had an option, I may have considered it. I was so grateful we burned the ships.

When you are in the dark times of your life, and it seems that you can't go on, remember that God is building your endurance, and you can go on. Just one step at a time and you will get moving.

The Holy Spirit will be with you and encourage you, and you will get through if you believe you can!

We made it to mile 40 completely exhausted, barely able to walk, and definitely fighting the urge to quit.

Then something amazing happened. A person that was supporting those walking had gone ahead and set up a small canopy tent, had lights hanging on it, and had chairs to sit in set up for us.

When we read scripture of those who were going through tough times, angels would show up to tend to them. I think of Paul, Peter, Jesus and others that had to endure tough times, and angels would show up.

I am not saying this person was an angel, but spiritually speaking, this was one of those times where an unexpected blessing changed the entire atmosphere.

We can be that support to others when we are in good times.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we may be the ones in the challenge, or we may be the support team.

Pray and ask God for those opportunities to be a blessing. For us at this moment it was a game changer.

With a renewed energy, a new pair of socks on, and a super coffee that I had been saving for 5 AM, we were feeling better.

The rain didn't stop, and it was still dark, but the finish line was in site.

We had a renewed energy that there was just 10 more miles, and we were still moving forward.

We talked about how grateful we were that our legs could keep moving.

At this point there were only 11 people left out of all of those that started.

The dark was starting to weigh on us, and we kept looking through the trees to see if we could get a glimpse of the horizon starting to lighten up.

Although we wanted light so bad, we had to be patient.

Just like our faith in Jesus, we knew and trusted that without a doubt the sun would come up eventually.

How many times do we lose faith at this point in our spiritual walk? I have.

Will Jesus come through this time? Will he be with me? Will the Holy Spirit actually guide me?

I want to challenge you as I challenged myself after this: Just as the sun comes up every day, so the Holy Spirit will be there to guide and support you.

Don't let your faith waiver, just patiently wait for him, even if you are suffering.

Finally the sun came up, and we were just about to the finish. All of a sudden we didn't feel so tired, and thoughts of getting breakfast were entering our minds.

We finished a little after 7 am, with a 19 ish minute mile pace including stops which was better than we had hoped for.

What a wonderful feeling it was to have endured and finished that challenge.

God used that situation to help me see how it applies spiritually, and that is why I am hopefully encouraging you today with it.

I firmly believe that from time to time we have to challenge our comfort.

Every so often we should do something that we only have a 50% chance of completing, in order to grow our endurance and prepare us for the difficult times the world may throw at us.

We also need to continue to train and grow spiritually, so that when our faith gets challenged we are trained and battle hardened to endure and bring others with us.

Intentionally putting ourselves in difficult situations trains us for when we may be thrown into one unexpectedly.

James 1 says “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity of great joy. For you know when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

This means that as we work to develop our faith while we are here, we will develop and be complete when we meet Jesus.

Our mission is to develop and train our faith endurance, and to encourage as many others to do the same by sharing the good news of Jesus and pointing them towards the word.

This is what I wanted to make sure I got across to you today as we head into the new year, because it is what God showed me:

Instead of trying “Resolutions” that usually fail after about 14 days, build a plan to grow your spiritual and physical endurance. Be diligent in getting to know God and his heart for you.

Look for opportunities to challenge yourself, whatever that may be. What scares you?

What have you not done because you are afraid of what people think?

What is something that God has placed on your heart that you haven't started because it seems too hard?

Res Kids plug?

If you are walking through something hard and it is dark hours, what are your thoughts like? You CAN get through it with the Holy Spirit!

James 1: 5 says If you need Wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask, make sure your faith is in God alone."

So do something hard. Look for opportunities that will challenge you. Even if you start small.

Train your mind for when the motivation wears off, and you feel like quitting. Train your mind to reject the thoughts of quitting and self pity.

When you feel good and excited about the challenge is the time to do this training.

Deal with the small problems holding you back, before they become big problems when you are in your darkest hour. What spiritual blisters are going to be a problem later for you?

Unforgiveness? That is like extra weight in your pack. Addictions? Like blisters that will disable you if you don't address them. Guilt, shame, or fear? Those are like the thoughts that can take us down when things get tough.

These need to be dealt with before they become something that takes us out.

It says in Ephesians 6 13: “Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will be standing firm.”

Walk through your Challenge (Whether you created it or something like a health issue or financial issue you are going through) with your head high, your thoughts trained on Jesus, and your mind ready to endure the dark hours.

Know that God will be with you. Have faith that he will send you what you need to endure.

Then enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that you allowed God to develop your endurance, and that you will be stronger and ready for future hard times the world throws at you!

Be blessed this coming year of 2026!

Let’s pray.