

I. John Wesley

- A. Our Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, 234 years ago. In those days, there were a couple of very powerful, very famous, very God-used preachers. One of them was named John Wesley. John Wesley was a traveling preacher here, in the U.S. in the days before and after the U.S. became a country.
- B. When I say preacher, don't picture a nice auditorium and people sitting there listening. John Wesley was a different kind of preacher. He was an open air preacher, a traveling, itinerant preacher. He got on his horse and rode from town to town and preached Jesus. He had an amazing ministry—John Wesley.
 - 1. Rode over 250,000 miles
 - 2. Gave away the equivalent of millions of dollars in charity
 - 3. Preached 40,000 miles
 - 4. Ordained over 500 ministers to carry on his work
 - 5. Published over 200 books, pamphlets, and sermons
 - 6. Fought slavery with all his might, enduring riots and enormous violence because of this
 - 7. Flooded small towns and villages across the untamed west small churches that reached over 135,000 members
- C. You've got to understand that Wesley was persecuted and endured hardship and rejection. The American colonies, especially in the small towns, were lawless and godless places. The message of Jesus was not welcome. John Wesley was a tough cowboy preacher.
- D. Here is a section from John Wesley's life. It gives a snippet of what this mighty man of God had in his heart.
 - 1. Sunday, A.M., May 5. Preached in St. Anne's—was asked not to come back anymore.
 - 2. Sunday, P.M., May 5. Preached in St. John's—Deacons said "Get out and stay out."
 - 3. Sunday, A.M., May 12. Preached in St. Jude's—can't go back there, either.
 - 4. Sunday, A.M., May 19. Preached in St. Somebody Else's—Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.
 - 5. Sunday, P.M., May 19. Preached on street—kicked off street.
 - 6. Sunday, A.M., May 26. Preached in meadow—chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.
 - 7. Sunday, A.M., June 2. Preached out at the edge of town—kicked off the highway.
 - 8. Sunday, P.M., June 2. Afternoon, preached in a pasture—ten thousand people came out to hear me.
- E. Seven rejections in a row, and then "Ten thousand people came out to hear me." John Wesley

II. Introduction

- A. Today I want to wrap up a series called Character Tour. We've been talking about character: How to develop character in ourselves and how to nurture character in our kids.
- B. So far, we have covered choices, integrity, self-control, faith, and courage.
- C. Today I want to add one more: endurance. Our topic today is endurance. In some ways, endurance is the acid test of all the other character qualities. Can you endure in your integrity? Endure in your self-control? Endure in your faith and courage? Because if you can't, I guess you can't really call it character, can you?
- D. If you don't have endurance, you don't have character.
- E. If you don't have endurance, you might have spasms of decency, but not character. Endurance gives meaning and muscle-power character in your life.
- F. The English word about endurance comes from a root that means "to make hard." The biblical words carry the idea of remaining faithful under hardship.
- G. Here's our definition today:
 - 1. Endurance is the toughness to pursue your God-ordained life in spite of opposition, hardship, pain or fatigue, while still displaying the character and love of Christ.
- H. Our case study for endurance will be the incredible story in the Old Testament about a man named Job.
- I. Here's our home base in the Bible today:
 - 1. *10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:10, 11, NKJV).*
- J. Job is probably the oldest book in the Bible. It tells an amazing story: A man whose faith endured, even when he was an emotional wreck.
- K. Let's fly over what happened.

III. Job

- A. *1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 Also, his possessions*

were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East (Job 1:1-3, NKJV).

1. Job loves God, and God loves Job. And everything is good. If you were composing the sound track to this story, the music would be happy and light.
 2. But not for long, now it turns dark and ominous. Now, it's heavy metal and Black Sabbath.
- B. *8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" 9 So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" 12 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:8-12, NKJV).*
1. Wow. There's so much here, I hardly know where to start, so I won't. All we can say is this: there is an invisible spiritual realm, where God lives and Satan opposes him. And stuff that happens there impacts stuff that happens here.
 2. Does Job know that God and Satan discussed him? No, he doesn't. If you've read the rest of this story, answer this: Does Job EVER know? No, he doesn't. He never knew what went on behind the scenes.
 3. So for reasons the Bible never discloses, other than to serve as evidence against Satan in his cosmic trial and ultimate condemnation—God permits Satan to bring disaster into Job's life. He can do anything he wants except to hurt Job personally.
- C. *13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; 14 and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 when the Sabeans raided them and took them away—indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" 16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" 17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" 18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"*
1. How do you handle that? In one day, Job lost his oxen, donkeys, ranch hands, sheep and shepherds, camels and hostlers—all his wealth—and then the worst of all: his sons and daughters. All of them. Dead. In one day.
 2. Have you ever felt that God painted a bull's eye on your back? Your job, your health, your marriage, your family, your life.
 3. This is the most massive test of character any person in the Bible beside Jesus ever faced. What did Job do?
- D. *20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong (Job 1:13-22, NKJV).*
1. Do you understand that life with God is a marathon, not a sprint?
 2. Do you get that you live in a valley of shadows? That your deeper, abiding reality is coming soon—that day when you open your eyes in heaven?
 3. Endurance is the toughness to pursue your God-ordained life in spite of opposition, hardship, pain or fatigue, while still displaying the character and love of Christ.
 4. Maybe God permits fiery times in your life, because that's what shines the gold to a high gloss. That's what burns off impurities. That's what honors God before devils and angels: you showing endurance, still pursuing your dream life no matter whom or what tries to stop you.
 5. So here's Job, a picture of endurance.
 6. But it gets worse. God does more bragging about Job, and Satan does more whining.
 7. So God permits Satan to touch Job's body, but not to take his life. Satan attacks with boils:
- E. *7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. 9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:7-10, NKJV).*

1. We could go on through this book because after the unspeakable torture of losing all his children, and then his own health, and then his wife turns on him—he faces his next torture:
2. A bunch of friends who think they know what’s going on.
3. For 42 chapters, they will torture him with asinine philosophy and here’s Job, devastated.
4. Sometimes, the best thing you can do is just shut up, sit there, and hand over a cup of cold water.
5. So there’s Job’s story—now let’s go back to James.

IV. James

- A. *10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:10, 11, NKJV).*
 1. Let’s start with that word “example.” If I were a Bible translator, I wouldn’t use “example”, I’d use a different word here. I’d use the word PARADIGM.
 2. Take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as a paradigm of suffering plus patience.
 3. That’s what James writes. If the topic is patience under suffering, you need a new paradigm: ancient prophets like Job, who went through fire and didn’t give up on God.
 4. If you want to develop the quality of endurance, you need a new paradigm.
 5. What was the old paradigm? That’s verse 9:
- B. *9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:9, NKJV).*
 1. Check this out: if your heart is a boxing ring, in one corner you have ENDURANCE and in the other corner you have GRUMBLING AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.
 2. What if Job grumbled against his workers for not protecting his children or the flocks? What if John Wesley spent his life grumbling against the people who opposed him?
 - a) You grumble when you blame.
 - b) You grumble when you try to get revenge.
 - c) You grumble when you whine or feel sorry for yourself.
 - d) You grumble when you let yourself dwell on your discouragements, and spend your days licking your wounds.
 - e) You grumble when you are easily offended.
 - f) You grumble when you’re prickly, and people around you have to walk on eggshells, because they’re afraid of triggering your temper.
 - g) You grumble when you criticize and complain, groan and moan.
 3. I want to call out the spirit of grumbling that exists in our town: A spirit of complaining and criticizing.
 4. Negative. Harsh. Judgmental. And yes, I get it, you’ve suffered.
 5. But you are operating under the wrong paradigm!
 6. Just because you’ve had a lousy day—or life, week or month—doesn’t give you the right to be a jerk. Not even for a day.
 7. That is the old paradigm. That is the fleshly, carnal, ungodly, hostile angry paradigm of how to handle suffering. You need a new paradigm.
 8. And there are two huge reasons why:
 - a) Because it spoils community: It destroys the love that Jesus wants us to have for one another. Love one another. Serve one another. Build up one another. Care for one another. Honor one another. God made us a body, a family, a tribe. And when you let tough times turn you against your family in Christ, you spoil the community of the saints. And that brings on the second reason why you need a new paradigm:
 - b) Because it puts you under God’s discipline. God goes after any person that damages that precious, loving community He’s working so hard to create.
 9. I need you to have endurance, and you need me to have endurance. Because character isn’t just about me, it’s about us. Character qualities, like endurance and integrity, that’s what makes us livable.
 10. That’s what makes us most like Jesus!
 11. I want to invite you today to switch paradigms when it comes to tough times in your life.
 12. How?
 13. Like every other character quality we have studied, endurance grows out your image of God. Your character is rooted in God’s character.
 14. I’m not making it up:
- C. *11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:11, NKJV).*
 1. So how do you read the story of Job, and come up with God being very compassionate and merciful?

2. Simple.
3. Read the end of the story:

V. The End of the Story

A. *10 And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. 12 Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. 13 He also had seven sons and three daughters (Job 42:10-13, NKJV).*

1. And I know that when you lose one child, another child never makes up the loss. I get that. That loss never goes away.
2. But God heals Job, physically, emotionally, spiritually.
3. And God rewards Job, too. The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.
4. And God fills his life with LOVE. His friends. His family. Job's life was an oasis of love in the desert.
5. Why?
6. Because he believed something about God in the pit of his stomach, ON the worst days of his life, Job said:
 - a) *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15, NKJV).*
 - b) *Surely even now my witness is in heaven, and my evidence is on high (Job 16:19, NKJV).*
 - c) *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27, NKJV).*
 - (1) He was going to meet his God again, and that meant he was going to meet his kids.
7. Job was a clinic in endurance: Endurance is the toughness to pursue your God-ordained life in spite of opposition, hardship, pain or fatigue, while still displaying the character and love of Christ.
 - a) And part of that means recognizing that **SOME OF THE PAYOFF FOR YOUR ENDURANCE WILL HAVE TO WAIT FOR HEAVEN.**
8. And you're displaying His character and love, because Jesus is living through you.
9. He's the vine, you're the branch, and when the branch stays connected to the vine, fruit happens and that includes endurance.
10. Job endured because he had an unshakeable conviction that the God of compassion and mercy was his God and that even when life went crazy, God was still on his side, every day, starting yesterday, and lasting till the end of days which is forever.
11. So he didn't lash out at God.
12. He didn't turn on his friends.
13. Because he saw the end of the story: that God is compassionate and full of mercy. God is tender hearted.
14. God understands your pain, your loss, your suffering. He gets it. He gets betrayal. He gets misrepresentation. He gets unfair treatment. He gets physical suffering. He gets friends turning their backs on him. He gets poverty. He gets political oppression. He gets loss. He gets fatigue. He gets mocking. He gets bullying. He gets agony. He gets being forsaken, by his Father.
15. He gets terror. He gets darkness. He gets death.
16. He gets it because He lived it. And He lived it for you. And He's willing to be your strength to relive it through you.

VI. Conclusion

- A. I'm not asking you to be religious.
- B. I'm not asking you to be Mr. Nice Guy or Mrs. Church Lady.
- C. I'm asking you to dig deep in your heart.
- D. I'm asking you to find your God-given dreams.
- E. I'm asking you team up with the people around you.
- F. I'm asking you stay plugged into Jesus, not on and off with Him, but close to Him, in worship, prayer, the word, and community.
- G. And I'm asking you to go after your deepest dreams by the power of God and the character of Christ and to not quit not matter how hard it gets.