



Stand

A Call for the Endurance of the Saints

John Piper | Justin Taylor

GENERAL EDITORS

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Stand

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Contributors

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Jerry Bridges is a well-known Christian writer and conference speaker whose best-known book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, has sold well over a million copies. His nine published books have sold over 2.5 million copies and have been translated and published in sixteen different languages. In addition to his writing ministry, Jerry also serves as a guest lecturer at several seminaries and speaks at numerous conferences all over the world. He has served on the staff of The Navigators since 1955 and currently serves as a resource person to The Navigators University Students Ministry in the United States. Jerry received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Jane, have two married children and six grandchildren and reside in Colorado Springs.

John MacArthur is a popular author and conference speaker and has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. John is a fifth-generation pastor, and his pulpit ministry has been extended around the globe through his media ministry, Grace to You, and its satellite offices in Australia, Canada, Europe, India, New Zealand, Singapore, and South Africa. In addition to producing daily radio programs for nearly two thou-

sand English and Spanish radio outlets worldwide, Grace to You distributes his books, software, audiotapes, and CDs. In thirty-six years of ministry, Grace to You has distributed more than thirteen million CDs and audiotapes. John is the president of The Master's College and The Master's Seminary, and he has written hundreds of books and study guides. His best-selling titles include *The Gospel According to Jesus*; *Ashamed of the Gospel*; *Twelve Ordinary Men*; and *The MacArthur Study Bible*, a 1998 ECPA Gold Medallion recipient. John and his wife, Patricia, have four grown children and fourteen grandchildren.

John Piper is pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. He grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, and studied at Wheaton College, where he first sensed God's call to enter the ministry. He went on to earn degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary (BD) and the University of Munich (DTheol). For six years he taught Biblical Studies at Bethel College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and in 1980 accepted the call to serve as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church. He has written, among other books, *Desiring God*; *Don't Waste Your Life*; *God Is the Gospel*; *Battling Unbelief*; and *What Jesus Demands from the World*. He is married to Noël and has four sons, one daughter, and eight grandchildren.

Helen Roseveare was born in England in 1925. She was born again while a medical student at Cambridge University in 1945, joined WEC International missionary society in 1950, and sailed for the Belgian Congo in 1953. Helen served first under Belgian colonial rule, then during the transfer to independence, then through the civil war in 1965, and finally in what became Zaire (renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo). During the next twenty years, Helen ministered by setting up a rural hospital, several rural clinics, and a training school for national paramedical workers, and by joining in the formation of a large inter-mission referral hospital and training college for nurses and midwives. Since 1973 she has served on the home-end of WEC International as a deputation worker, speaking to young people, university students, and church groups all over the English-speaking world, challenging them to consider God's claim on their lives for full-time service. She has also written several books for

her mission, underlining principles for Christian living and missionary outreach work.

Justin Taylor is the project director and managing editor of the ESV Study Bible (2008) and an associate publisher at Crossway Books. With Kelly Kopic he has edited new editions of two classic works by John Owen: *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* and *Communion with the Triune God*. And with John Piper he has edited a number of books from the Desiring God conferences: *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things*; *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*; *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*; and *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*. He blogs daily at Between Two Worlds (<http://theological.blogspot.com/>). He and his wife, Lea, have three children.

Introduction

Justin Taylor

John Piper recently recounted his father’s unwavering faith, even in his closing years:

Even in his final years of dementia, he rejoiced. In the last month that he was able to keep a journal (April of 2004), he wrote, “I’ll soon be 86 but I feel strong and my health is good. God has been exceedingly gracious and I am most unworthy of His matchless grace and patience. *The Lord is more precious to me the older I get.*”¹

Read that final line again, slowly. What an amazing sentence—even in the midst of dementia, he felt the increasing preciousness of the presence of Christ. One of the purposes of the book you hold in your hands is to encourage you and equip you to truthfully write such a sentence—and mean it—in the final season of your life.

What Is Perseverance and Endurance?

One of the best biblical definitions concerning the path of endurance and perseverance is provided in the apostle Paul’s statement, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12). Beginning at the end, we can note three truths he taught here: first, the foundation of Paul’s (and our) perseverance is that Christ has made us his own. Jesus says to us what he said to his disciples: “You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .” (John 15:16). Christ is the initiator in this relationship. Second, we have not yet arrived. There is no ultimate arrival—either qualitatively or temporally—prior to

¹John Piper, “Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy,” delivered at the Desiring God Pastors Conference (February 5, 2008); emphasis added. Available at www.desiringGod.org.

standing face-to-face with God himself. We are in process, still in the midst of the fight, still running the race. God “began a good work” in us, but he will only “bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). Finally, despite the fact that it is ultimately God’s work, it is done *through* our work, not *instead* of our work. Paul says that we must “press on,” making it our own.

Building off of such teaching, theologian John Murray proposed a definition to take account of the full biblical witness on this theme: “Perseverance means the engagement of our persons in the most intense and concentrated devotion to those means which God has ordained for the achievement of his saving purpose.”² Note a number of things: first, perseverance involves not just a part of us (mind or body or spirit), but all of us—our whole person. Second, it involves “the most intense and concentrated devotion.” No one should drift toward the finish line. It involves serious effort (which is why Paul compared it to a fight and a race!). Third, intense, whole-person devotion is only as good as its object. Therefore Murray makes clear that the devotion must be to “those means which God has ordained for the achievement of his saving purpose.” God’s people will persevere by God’s grace by using God’s means (“especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer”³) to the advancement of God’s glory.

Overview of the Contributors

In accordance with Philippians 3:12, none of the contributors to this book will claim to have already obtained full sanctification; but each of them is pressing on to make it his or her own because Christ Jesus has first made them his own.

You’ll notice that each contributor has decades of experience in walking with Jesus. Helen Roseveare was born in 1925, Jerry Bridges in 1928, John MacArthur in 1939, John Piper in 1946. Randy Alcorn is the youngster of the group, born in 1954.

As someone a few years younger than these wise saints, I think it would be a grave mistake to assume that this is therefore a book only for those who are older. All Christians, no matter their age, want to

²John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 192–193.

³Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer #154.

make it to the end. And we don't want to barely make it by the skin of our teeth, but to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and . . . run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1–2). One of the best ways we can do this is to sit at the feet of those who have spent years running with Jesus.

Overview of the Chapters

Jerry Bridges says there are four foundational, fundamental actions that will enable us to fight the good fight of faith and to finish well: (1) a daily time of focused personal communion with God; (2) a daily appropriation of the gospel; (3) a daily commitment to be a living sacrifice to God; (4) a firm belief in the sovereignty and love of God. Bridges reminds us that our aim is not only to persevere but to endure—not only to stand firm but to move forward toward the finish line and the presence of God in glory.

John Piper addresses the question of how to get old to the glory of God. The key, he says, is to grow old in a way that makes God (and not the world) look glorious and all-satisfying. But a significant obstacle toward this goal is the fear of not maintaining a treasuring of Christ. Two common strategies seek to overcome this fear: (1) the belief that perseverance in faith and love are not essential for final salvation, and (2) the belief that the necessity of perseverance depends on our own efforts. Piper explains why both views are dead wrong: perseverance is necessary for final salvation, and perseverance is certain for all those who are in Christ. The biblical antidote for overcoming the fear of not preserving is to see the fight of faith as a fight to delight in Christ as our highest treasure.

John MacArthur has been in pastoral ministry at one church long enough to witness every kind of attack imaginable: on his character, his life, and his ministry. So in order to learn how to survive, MacArthur has made a lifelong study of Paul's life. Drawing especially upon a careful examination of 2 Corinthians, MacArthur shows what Paul embraced:

- the superiority of the new covenant
- the reality that ministry is a mercy
- the necessity of a pure heart

- the duty of accurately handling the Word of God
- the truth that the results of his ministry did not depend on him
- the reality of his own insignificance
- the benefits of suffering
- the need for bold conviction
- eternity as the priority

Randy Alcorn, at our request, recounts his own family's perseverance in a trial. He also explains some of the things he has learned from endurance in a cause: namely, that we should be motivated by Jesus, not by anger; that endurance in a cause can build the character, faith, and insight of children; and that followers of Jesus should expect injustice and misrepresentation. With regard to endurance in general, Alcorn observes that who you become is the product of the daily choices you make—what you daily choose to delight in and meditate upon. Alcorn closes by telling the moving story of Jim Elliot's brother, the one whom almost no one knows.

Helen Roseveare has lived a fascinating life of endurance with Christ. In her personal and biblical chapter, she touches upon the past, the present, and the future testimony of her Christian life, organized around the theme of "one thing." First, *one thing I know*—from the statement of the man who encountered Jesus and relayed to the authorities, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). Second, *one thing I do*—from Paul's statement about perseverance: "one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead . . ." (Phil. 3:13). Third, *one thing I ask*—from the psalmist's prayer: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

The book closes with two interviews I conducted during the conference from which this book originated (September 28–29, 2007). The first was with John Piper and John MacArthur, the second with all of the contributors minus MacArthur. The transcripts are lightly edited but still retain the feel of the actual conversations. Our hope is that these sessions will give you a bit of personal insight into these

men and women who are seeking to endure and are teaching us to do the same.

Blessings and Benedictions for Our Readers

Have you ever noticed that many of the biblical benedictions and blessings concern God's keeping and your persevering? Toward that end, we pray the following may be true of all those who take up this book:

The LORD bless you and keep you. . . . (Num. 6:24)

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1 Thess. 5:23–24)

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, 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. (Heb. 13:20–21)

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24–25)

Amen.