HOW TO KEEP ON GOING

Luke 13:32-33; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Good morning! Last week, Easter Sunday was a really great celebration. It was great to just remember what Jesus did for us to have eternal life ourselves. So, we had fun, food, and fellowship. Praise God for a great attendance. Praise God many of you returned. But you know what, after all the celebration and fun, when we got back home and we’re all alone, the realities of life set in. The celebration is just like an image on a car’s mirror that gradually faded from view as you travel along your life’s journey. Let’s face it, we all face problems. They come. If you don’t have them, I guarantee you they’ll come.

If you have them right now, you may be feeling tired and stressed. And that’s not the way life should be lived. Didn’t Jesus promise us an abundant life? A life that’s full? But we all know that we live in a world that is stressful. From the moment we wake up to the time we hit the bed, we feel the stress. Some of us resort to medicines, exercises, books, entertainment, to relieve us of this stress.

There is good news, folks. The Bible is our source of help. God gives us principles so that we can survive in this fractured world. So, I’m starting a 5-part series called “Conquering the Stresses in Your Life”.

What are the stresses in your life? Can you name some of them? Even a little child experiences stress, right? They’re stressed about their parents who are stressed out with them. It’s mutual. Just the same with couples. I hope this series will help you to get your stress level down.

So, today, in this message I have entitled, “How to Keep on Going”, I want us to look in God's Word at finding the strength to keep going. But what I want to emphasize in this message is how to find strength when you’re emotionally worn out. You see, I'm not going to talk about when you're physically worn out, when you're physically tired, that's a much easier problem actually to solve. When you're physically tired, you just need rest and relaxation, you just get some time off and get some sleep. But sleep and rest alone will not cure the emotional fatigue, the spiritual fatigue, the relational fatigue that many people are feeling. What you need is a strategy to recharge your spiritual and emotional battery. When you become lo-batt, this is what you do.

 You see, there's going to be many times in life when you need to keep going, when your mind and your emotions have already shut down. They've shut down from emotional overload or from fatigue and just working too long and putting up too much time and helping too many people. Today, I want us to look at three solutions from God's Word about how to keep on going when you feel like giving up. The Bible has a lot to say about developing the qualities of resilience and endurance and determination. But before we actually look at some secret steps or keys or principles, I want to give you two examples in Scripture of determination to keep going.

 One is Jesus, and the other is the Apostle Paul. The first is the determination of Jesus to keep going in spite of opposition. Jesus faced constant opposition in his ministry. Both the religious leaders and the political leaders were constantly trying to stop Jesus from teaching and ministering, they didn't want him doing this. He was too popular. At one point, they tried to intimidate Jesus to stop his ministry by telling him, "King Herod wants to kill you."

 Now, in Luke 13:32-33 (NIRV), we find Jesus’ response when the Pharisees came to threaten him. Here's what Jesus said, “*Go and tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons. I will keep on healing people today and tomorrow. And on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day. Certainly no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”*

Notice Jesus said, “I must keep going”. In other words, Jesus said nothing's going to stop me, not criticism, not opposition. So, Jesus had the quality of resilience and endurance and determination to keep on keeping on. The second example we have is the determination of Paul, and Paul was determined to keep going in spite of pain. We find that 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. Paul says there, in the New Living Translation, *"We are hard pressed on every side by troubles."* Does that sound familiar? Maybe you feel right now you're hard pressed on every side by troubles. In other words, it's coming at you from many different directions. Paul says we're hard pressed on many sides, every side by troubles, *“but we're not crushed and broken.”* Then he says, *"We're perplexed…"* In other words, sometimes we're confused. We don't know which way to go. *“But,”* he says, *“we don't give up and quit.”* That's determination. We don't give up and quit. Then he says, *"We're hunted down, but God never abandons us."* And he says, *"Yes, we get knocked down, but we get up again, and we keep going."* Both Jesus and Paul, use this phrase, “keep going”.

So, how do you keep going? Where do I get the strength to keep going when I feel like I'm tired, I don't have the emotional energy to keep going. The answer is you get the power and the strength to keep going the same place Jesus and Paul got it. They got it from God. But that's just the simple answer. There are actually some key actions, three key actions and attitudes that you're going to need to make it to the finish line, to have the strength to keep on keeping on in the things you know God wants you to do when you feel like giving up.

 Now, let's get right into it. The first key to daily strength that you need to keep going is this, write it down, or take a picture.

1. Honestly tell God what I'm feeling.

That's the starting point. You start with just being honest to God. You don't tell him what you think you ought to feel, you admit what you're really feeling. So, are you feeling frustrated? Then tell God. Are you feeling exhausted? Then tell that to him. Do you feel like you can't go on like this? Tell him. You feel like you're under attack? You feel discouraged and overwhelmed? Tell God. You feel angry, even angry at God? Tell him that. You just go ahead and dump everything you're feeling right now on the Lord. You say, "Can I actually do that?" Well, the Bible says you can. 1 Peter 5:7 says, *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”.* Another version (NJB) says, *"Unload all your burdens on him, since he is concerned about you."* I love that. Unload. Unload.

You know that word in the Greek means literally “drop it”. That's what it means. You let it go. It's not like you're throwing it a long distance. It's like if you're carrying a big, big rock, you just let it go. You dump it. You unburden yourself. The Bible says that when you feel like you're overstressed, you're over worried, you're overburdened, you just let it go. That’s what it means to tell God what you’re feeling.

But, of course, God knows already what’s in your heart even before you tell him. Still he wants you to come to him because he loves to listen to your every heartache and heartbrokenness. In Psalm 116:1-2 (GNT), David says this: *"I love the Lord, because he hears me; he listens to my prayers. He listens to me every time I call to him."*

Folks, God is a listening God. He is never too busy for a conversation with you. You may get too busy for a conversation with him, but he is never too busy for a conversation with you. God has an unlimited data plan. Okay? He doesn't have call waiting, he doesn't have a recording that says, "Press one, if you want to talk to God the Father, press two if you want to talk to Jesus, press three if you need the Holy Spirit." Also, he doesn't have attention deficit and go, "What were you talking about? Can you say that again?" God is always attentive, and he's always ready to have a conversation. He doesn’t wear a watch and looks at it as you converse with him. You see, the truth is, God is always waiting on you to talk. God is never going to say, "Not now. I can't talk, I'm busy. Can you talk to me a little bit later about this?" No, God is waiting to talk to you.

"What about when I'm just complaining?" He still listens. Did you know that? You see, a lot of the Psalms are complaints of David. In Psalm 55:17, David says: *"Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice."* Now listen to me, God can handle your complaints. He can handle your frustrations, he can handle your doubts. He can handle your fears. He's not going to be upset with you on that. He can handle your questions. He can handle your grief. He can handle your discouragement, he can handle your struggles, your depression. Why? Because he made you to love you. You can't make God stop loving you. You can try but you'll fail because God's love is based on who he is.

 Psalm 145:9 says, *"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."* Did you get that? The Lord is good to everyone. He shows good things to everybody, even those who are atheist who don't believe in him or whatever, who are rejecting him, who are mad at him. The Lord is good to everyone, and he shows compassion to all he has made. By the way, if God is good to everybody, and he shows compassion to all he has made, shouldn't you and I do the same with people we disagree with? Do you show compassion to people you disagree with? Are you good to people who you think are an enemy? God is good to everyone, and compassionate with everyone.

 Now, because God loves to listen to us, and even our complaints about stress and COVID and everything else, then God tells us to come quickly to him whenever we're stressed, whenever we're at the end of our rope, and we're ever ready to throw in the towel. Lamentations 2:19 says *"Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.”*

Have you been doing that? If you haven't, that's one of the reasons why you may be emotionally dried and drained. Do you hear the passion in that verse? Do you hear the urgency in that verse that God wants you to have? He says cry out, not mumble some memorized cliche prayer for the gift and the giver and bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies. No, he says, “Cry out.” Say, “God, help me. Help me. I don't know if I can keep going or not. It's just too hard. I'm about to lose it, I'm at the end of my rope. I'm out of options, I can't handle this.” That's being honest to God.

 So, folks, this is the first key to gaining daily strength, the daily strength that you need in order to keep going and make it to the finish line and finish well in your life. Honestly tell God, what I'm feeling.

Now the second key to daily strength that you're going to need to keep going is this.

1. Humbly ask God for strength.

Psalm 105:4 says this: *"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."* That's pretty clear. Don't look for any other source for emotional strength, look to the Lord. Who are you looking to for emotional strength in your life? Look to the Lord for his strength.

Job 12:13 says: *"To God belong wisdom and power."* God is the real source of power. If you want to last, ask God to give you power. So, if God is the real source of strength or power in your life why don't you keep asking for strength, literally throughout your day? Not just once in the morning or once at night. Why not throughout the day? "God, I need strength as I'm going into this meeting. God, I need strength as I'm going to the doctor's appointment. God, I need power as I'm picking up the kids. God, I need power as I'm preparing this task, or this meal." Keep asking because God will never tire of giving. He is a giving God. And he wants to give you what will benefit you.

 The Bible says you do not have because you don't ask God. Did you know that about 20 times in the New Testament, we are commanded by God to ask? We are commanded about 20 times to ask in prayer. The Bible says, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* (Matt. 7:7) Jesus said if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it. Jesus said ask so that your joy will be full.

 Now, studies have confirmed that the more depleted you are emotionally, the harder it is for you to get to sleep or to stay asleep. When I saw that, I thought, "Man, the impact of COVID, and all the changes in our world has probably left millions of people sleep deprived." You may have never realized this, but did you know that your relationship with God can affect your sleep? When you're out of fellowship with God, when you're in rebellion against God, did you know that your body recognizes that even if you aren't consciously aware of the conflict? And your body takes it out. But when you're in harmony with God, you'll get the peace, and you'll get the strength of God. Do you know what it does? It leads to better sleep. King David is an example. He's running for his life, people were trying to kill him, and he's hiding in caves. During that time, he wrote these words, Psalm 3:5, he says, *"* *I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me."* Do you see the connection between God giving you strength and you being able to sleep?

 Now, when you ask God, you ask in humility. God loves a humble heart. We see this in the life of Daniel as he prayed to God. In Daniel 10:11-12, God responds to Daniel’s prayer through an angel. You see, Daniel was in a situation where he was under enormous stress in the society he was in. So, he prayed to God. and the angel says this to Daniel, *“‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.’”*

Notice, Daniel humbled himself before God. That’s the attitude God wants us to have when we come to him. You see, the attitude that moves God to answer your prayers is humility. God, I'm depending on you, I'm trusting in you, I can't do this on my own. I don't have the wherewithal, I don't have the emotional energy to keep on keeping on. That admission is humility.

 So, let's just review. If I need strength to keep going, and all of us do, you're going to need it this week, how do I have the strength to keep going when I want to just do nothing? Number one, honestly tell God what I'm feeling and number two humbly ask God for his strength.

Now, here's the third key that the Bible teaches us to having the daily strength that you need to keep going when you're under stress or in times of great change. Here's the third key,

1. Constantly keep God as my focus.

What does that mean? It means don't let yourself be distracted by less important things. All the stuff that the cable news and everybody else thinks is so important, it's not that important.

This is a powerful tool for having the strength to keep going for the rest of your life, to finishing well. Hebrews 12:2 says this: *"…fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Now, that verse is chock full of spiritual truth, but I just want to mention a couple of things. The reason that Jesus was able to keep going strong, even through the pain and the shame of the cross, was because of what he focused on. Did you see that? He wasn't focused on the current pain, the current problems, the current stress, the current difficulties, the current criticisms. He wasn't focused on all that.

He was focused on the future joy. He says he looked to the joy that was set before him, he looked past the cross to the reward. He looked to the future glory. He had an eternal perspective. Now listen, if you only face life, your life, with short term perspective, you're not going to keep going strong. I don't give you a snowball's chance of finishing well if you have a short-term focus only, because you'll give up, you'll quit. But if you want to be like Jesus, you look past the pain to the promise, you look past the cross, to the joy in heaven.

Let me just ask you a pointed question right now. What do you think about the most these days? Think about that. Be honest. What do you think about most these days? Is it short term or long term? And what do you talk about most these days? The reason I'm asking this question is because whatever you think about the most, and whatever you talk about the most, that's your life focus. And if it's not Jesus, it's no wonder you're draining, it's no wonder you’re losing your energy.

 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

 Now in those verses, we’ll find five reasons why we don’t give up, why we shouldn’t give up. And I want you to capture this truth. Are you ready? Very quickly, here they are.

We never give up because, number one, our spirits are being renewed each day. You say, "How do I get my spirit renewed every day?" Get in God’s Word, the Bible. Jesus says, *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* (John 17:17) And in Matt. 4:4, he says, *“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”* You wouldn't think of fasting for a week, right? But some people, they don't open their Bible for an entire week. Folks, it is soul food. The way you get your spirit renewed, is to get in his word every day. His word is first and last, period.

Second reason we don't give up. Because we know that all the troubles on earth are temporary. They don't last. You know what? Even if I had a problem that lasted my entire life, and I do, like my panic attacks, that's miniscule compared to the trillions and trillions of years we're going to have in heaven. So we know the problems on earth are temporary. But being with Jesus is long term and permanent.

Three, we know that God is using everything in our lives to build our character. As the Bible says, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”* (Rom. 8:28). Folks, God is using even the bad stuff to build our character. Four, the Bible says in that passage, we know the reward is going to be great, and it's going to last for eternity. And number five, to stay strong emotionally, we keep our eyes on God. We fix our attention on him. We focus on God, not on the problems.

 So let me ask you, what are you focused on today? All the mess in the world? Stop looking at your problems. Start looking at Jesus again.

I want to close with a scripture. That's going to be my prayer for you all this next week. It’s Colossians 1:11. Because I want you to make it to the finish line. My job as your pastor is a spiritual coach to help you keep on keeping on, and to not get sidelined in this marathon of life, to not run off in the ditch. Here’s my prayer for each of you, *"May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience."*

 Friend, you're able to keep going because you're filled with the mighty strength of God's Spirit in you, and that makes you joyful, even in the most depressing times, and in the most discouraging situations, that still makes you joyful. It's not false optimism, it's the joy that comes from a deep trust in Jesus. That's my prayer for you. I hope you'll put these keys three keys into practice starting this week. But before we close, let me say a word to those of you who may not be sure that you've been saved by Jesus. The only way you're going to finish well in life is by letting Jesus give you his presence in your heart, his power in your life. To enable you to fulfill his promise that he has for your soul and your whole life, you need to be saved.

 In 2 Timothy 1:8-9, and I’m quoting from the Message Translation, it says this: *"We can only keep on going, after all, by the power of God, who first saved us."* Now, before you can have the power of God in your daily life, you got to let God save you. He first saves you, and then he gives you the power for daily living. So, the big question is, are you saved? Do you know that Jesus saved you. Friend, it’s simple, all you need to know is that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, he was buried, and on the third day he rose again. He died because he is the perfect sacrifice. Your good works cannot save you. Your religion can’t, your connections, can’t, you can’t do anything to save you. Jesus did it all for you. When you sincerely accept that fact, then you receive Jesus in your heart as your Lord and Savior. And you surrender and give your life to him. You let him take control. Later on, after we sing, I’ll give you the opportunity to pray and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

 Let’s all stand and sing.