

# Adventuring with God

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## Possessing Our Souls

In Luke 21:19 (KJV), Jesus says to His disciples: **“In your patience possess ye your souls.”** In the NIV it is translated **“By standing firm you will gain life.”** I’ve often puzzled over this verse, wondering if I really understand what Jesus is getting at. Looking at the biblical context, we find this remark embedded in a long discourse about the end times.

Jesus pulls no punches describing what it will be like to serve Him in the last days. Some of the church will be persecuted, betrayed, even put to death for His name’s sake. Those fortunate enough to escape these things will still find themselves surrounded by terrifying developments—wars and revolutions throughout the earth, the rise of false Christs, and widespread earthquakes, famine, and disease. During those days even the sun, moon, and stars will no longer follow predictable patterns. No wonder **“men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming upon the earth”** (v. 26).

But His word to us is **“Do not be frightened”** (v. 9). Is that possible? Can we find the strength to not give in to fear in such perilous times? Jesus says we can ... if we learn how to possess our souls. So what exactly does this old English word mean? According to the dictionary, someone who is “self-possessed” is composed, in full control of his feelings and actions. The circumstances he finds himself in don’t shake him because he is drawing from resources deep within.

For the Christian, the inner strength we draw from is called faith—faith in God and in His promises to

us. James in his letter wrote: **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”** (James 1:2-4).

It’s interesting that he links perseverance (standing firm) with spiritual maturity. In other versions, the word “perseverance” is translated “patience.” In patience and perseverance, in clinging to our faithful heavenly Father, we are able to possess our souls—that is, keep ourselves in a place of tranquility and confidence even when we are going through tremendous storms of all kinds. This was Jesus’ secret of spiritual power, and it can be ours too. It all depends upon how we respond to the opportunities we face—the opportunities that come disguised as trials.

So many of my friends are undergoing incredible testing right now. Some of their trials are related to illness and health issues, some are financial or career challenges, and some are based in relationship problems of various kinds. I can (and should) give them any physical help I can offer, but I also need to pray for them—that under the testing they will not give up their faith in God. Jesus prayed for Simon Peter this way: **“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”** (Luke 22:31-32).

Besides the resource of remembering God's word, prayer is what helped me to stand firm during my battle with cancer last year. Though severely tested, my faith was able to withstand the attacks of discouragement, doubt, and flashes of anger that I felt at times. It wasn't just my own prayers, either. When I couldn't pray I knew others were interceding for me. How I thank God for their faithful service on my behalf!

During this time of testing I kept asking God to *deliver* me from it—to keep me from being thrown into what I saw as a “fiery furnace.” Fortunately, my Father knew better than I did what would benefit me most. Had I not gone into that furnace (that at times seemed seven times hotter than I believed myself able to bear), I would have missed an opportunity to discover new revelations of His faithfulness. Recently I ran across the following quote about the value of “furnace” experiences.

“God could keep us from the furnace,  
from our paths each trial turn;  
but He'd have us know the rapture  
of the flame that does not burn.”

Satan tries his best to discourage us when we're in the middle of our trials. He'd like us to believe that God is withholding deliverance for some sinister reason, but Scripture assures us that our Father does not willingly afflict us; He simply uses affliction to bring us to a place of greater faith and trust in Him—the place where we can possess our souls. Our lives will become even more difficult as we move towards the last days before Jesus' return. So it's important that we settle our hearts now about what we will stand on. I've always liked the hymn by Edward Mote entitled “The Solid Rock.” Here are some of its lyrics:

“When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace;  
in every high and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds within the veil.  
On Christ the solid Rock I stand:  
All other ground is sinking sand.  
His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
support me in the whelming flood;

when all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay.”

As we stand on and in Christ Jesus, we draw from the deep well of God's grace that will keep us “safe and secure from all alarms.” Both now and in the difficult days ahead, we can be confident—we can stand firm—as we keep our eyes and heart fixed upon Him.

I continue to face health-related challenges, and there are times when I could give in to fear in spite of all I learned last year about God's faithful care. When Satan comes to tempt me in this way, I have to choose again to trust my good and faithful Father. I have to remind myself that “**The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms**” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Jesus' prayer for Simon Peter in Luke 22 was answered. Peter (unlike Judas) survived the testing of his faith. He became a powerful witness for Christ and strengthened his brothers. From what he learned through his “furnace” experience, here's his advice to us: “**Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be *self-controlled* and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, *standing firm in the faith*, because you know that your brothers [and sisters] throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, *firm and steadfast*.**” (1 Peter 5:7-10).

The great preacher C.H. Spurgeon said: “Our faith is the center of the target God aims at when He tests us. There is nothing that pierces faith to its very marrow like shooting the arrow of the feeling of being deserted into it. And only genuine faith will escape unharmed from the midst of the battle. Blessed is the person who endures such an ordeal!” (quoted in *Streams in the Desert* by L.B. Cowman)

What kind of pressure are you under today? Is there something you are facing that is beyond what you believe you're able to endure? Do you feel alone and

abandoned in spite of all of God's promises to you?  
Are you in danger of giving in to fear or anger or  
despair? Choose to look up and receive from the  
Lord what you need. Draw from the deep well of  
grace that has been given to you in redemption.

Remember the One you belong to and trust Him,  
even if you have to experience a fiery furnace. He is  
with you in it! That assurance will empower you to  
stand firm and thereby possess your soul.

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O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend.  
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel Thee near me! the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.  
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee,  
That where Thou art in glory, there shall Thy servant be;  
And Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.

O let me see Thy footprints, and in them plant mine own;  
My hope to follow duly is in Thy strength alone.  
O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end;  
And then in heaven receive me, my Savior and my Friend.

“O Jesus I Have Promised” by John E. Bode, 1868

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