

Consumed Part 4

Enduring Perpetual Offenses

Abigail's union with Nabal hardly resembled a marriage. With little or no companionship, communication, affection, affirmation, love, protection, and spiritual unity, it would seem that Abigail had little reason to honor the commitment she had made to Nabal before God. But rather than losing hope and giving up, Abigail patiently endured her difficult marriage and demonstrated great mercy to her husband. Her life exemplifies Paul's words in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV).

Hebrews 10:35-36 says, "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (NIV).

Have you ever considered your marital difficulties to be a part of God's will for your life? Why or why not? _____

Abigail demonstrated many evidences of God's Spirit in her life, but perhaps the most apparent was her unrelenting ability to continue on the right path regardless of how difficult her marriage became. In this lesson, we will devote our time to the study of two Greek words: *hupomone* and *makrothumia*, known to us as "patience" and "longsuffering."

Why do we rarely see the words "suffering," "patience," and "longsuffering (mercy)," used in conjunction with "marriage"? _____

From what examples did you form *your* views of marital commitment? _____

Read Galatians 5:22-23. What characteristic is the most difficult for you to display when you are facing difficulties in your marriage? _____

Hopeless

Hupomone is "bearing up under, patience, endurance, as to things or circumstances. *Hupomone* is associated with hope and refers to that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial."¹

Define hope. _____

When difficulties arise in our marriages, we press forward with the hope that our troubles will soon pass and that God will use them to bring positive and lasting change to our relationships. But when our troubles remain and we see little or no change in our spouses, feelings of despondency, or hopelessness, set in.

Despondency is the opposite of hope. (Remember, *hupomone* is inspired by hope.) Depending on the severity, it can appear in the form of depression, anger, fear, withdrawal, neglect, or even suicide. It begins when we allow ourselves to believe that our marriage, or our spouse, is incapable of redemption or improvement. For the wife suffering under its power, its darkness seems to shroud God's presence.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18 and answer the following questions:

What feelings overtook Elijah, leading to his despair? Where was his focus? _____

Describe his despondency. _____

Physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted, Elijah simply could not go on. The same God who ministers to us, patiently waited and nourished Elijah until he was able to take the first step out of the darkness.

In verse 7, what words were spoken by the Angel of the Lord, acknowledging his sufferings?

With the strength the Lord supplied, he carried on. According to verse 10, was Elijah free of his difficulties? _____

What did God command Elijah to do in verse 15? Record the first two words.

In the end, the Lord fought Elijah's battle,² just as he fought Abigail's.

Confident Expectation

First Corinthians 10:13 tells us that *"no temptation has overtaken [us] except such as is common to man"* (NKJV). The Greek word for *"temptation"* in this verse is *peirasmos*, meaning "an experiment, attempt, trial, proving...of man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy." The Message says it this way: *"No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it."*

You were asked whether or not you believe that your marital troubles are a part of God's will for your life. Let's take that a step further. Have you considered the possibility that your past or present troubles were allowed so that your "fidelity, integrity, virtue, and constancy" may be tested? Why or why not? _____

"Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10, NKJV).

It has been said that "nothing happens to any man which he is not formed by nature to bear."³ Do you believe this in regard to your marriage? Why or why not? _____

The book of Job tells the story of a man who lost his livelihood, home, children, servants, and health, all in a matter of moments. To make matters worse, his wife and friends ridiculed and accused him relentlessly. Although at times he found hopelessness knocking on the door of his heart (see Job 19:10), he did not surrender to his trial, but bore his sufferings with great patience.

Read the following verses and list the hope that enabled Job to patiently endure his circumstances.

• Job 19:25-27 _____

• Job 23:8-12 _____

According to the following verses, what hope—or confident expectation—can we count on amidst our sufferings?

• Romans 8:28-29 _____

• 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 _____

• 2 Timothy 1:12 _____

• 2 Timothy 2:10-13 _____

• Review Hebrews 10:35-36 _____

• Hebrews 12:1-3 _____

• James 1:2-4 _____

• 1 Peter 1:6-7 _____

First Peter 4:19 says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful creator” (NKJV).

Mercy

In contrast to *hupomone*, *makrothumia* is “forbearance, long-suffering, self-restraint, before proceeding to action.” It is “the quality of a person who is able to avenge himself yet refrains from doing so. *Makrothumia* is **patience in respect to persons** [and] is associated with mercy”²⁴ (emphasis mine).

More important than your ability to patiently endure difficult circumstances is your ability to *be patient* with your husband during trials.

Read Romans 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:18, and 2 Peter 3:9, 15. What common theme emerges in these verses? _____

Now compare these verses to 1 Corinthians 7:10-17 and 1 Peter 3:1-2. What is your conduct saying to your spouse about God's long-suffering and mercy? _____

Never forget that God's forbearance towards you meant your salvation. When you are tempted to be angry and give up on your husband, remember that God never thought you incapable of redemption and improvement!

Turn now to Lamentations 3:21-23. As you read through this passage, reflect on the mercy you have been shown. God's *makrothumia* says, "I will not give-up on you!" Can you say the same to your husband? _____

Abigail suffered long. She bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, and endured all things (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7).

In closing, read Hebrews 12:12-15.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What circumstances have led to feelings of hopelessness in your marriage? When you find yourself in the midst of these circumstances, is your mind focused on your strength and ability to endure, or on God's strength and ability to uphold you? Explain.
2. According to Isaiah 41:10, what can you be assured of during prolonged periods of marital difficulty?
3. Do you believe that the Lord designs your difficulties with your ability to endure in mind? Why or why not?
4. First Corinthians 10:13 alludes to the fact that we often *feel* we will be overtaken by the trial before us, when in fact, we will not. How have you allowed your fears to become bigger than God?
5. We also learned in 1 Corinthians 10:13, that our difficulties are oftentimes a "proving" of our "fidelity, integrity, virtue, [and] constancy." Fidelity is loyalty, faithfulness, dependability, reliability, trustworthiness, devotion, and commitment. When tested in your marriage, has your heart proven faithful to God or to yourself?
6. When a wife begins to harden her heart against her husband, she will disconnect and push him away, until finally she decides to give up. In what ways have you begun to harden your heart toward your husband?
7. Hopelessness says that you believe your circumstance, or your husband is beyond the reach of remedy or cure, redemption or improvement. What, specifically, do you believe God is unable to change about your relationship?
8. "*For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?*" (1 Corinthians 7:16, NKJV). Does this verse give you hope, or reveal despondency in your heart?

**WOMAN: THE GLORY OF MAN
SHINING IN THE MIDST OF YOUR MARRIAGE**

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9. Take a minute to reflect on the patience and mercy God has shown you. How does this challenge you to extend the same towards your spouse?

10. Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. Will you trust Him from beginning to end?

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992. G5281

² See 1 Kings 21:17-24 and 2 Kings 9:30-37.

³ Merriam-Webster, Inc: *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations*. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1992, S. 115 (MARCUS AURELIUS, *Meditations*)

⁴ Zodhiates, G3115.