

LIVING WORD BOOKS

MENSA OTABIL



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Dr. Mensa Otabil ©2012

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INTRODUCTION

Running a marathon requires many things. It takes desire and preparation, training and energy. However, no matter how many weeks or months you train, no matter how many carbohydrates you've eaten before the race, or how good your running posture or the trainers on your feet, there will come a point in the race, where none of that will matter. The initial adrenaline and stamina of the start will inevitably begin to fail. Your oxygen will be depleted, and you'll begin to pant. Your muscles will get weary, and the crowded race will thin out. There will be no partners by your side to run with.

At this point, you will be at a crossroads, and in danger of giving in. When your mouth becomes dry, your knees and ankles ache, and your chest burns, the shoes, the carbs and the hours of training will be of little import. In that space—the most difficult part of the race—all that will matter is whether or not you have endurance.

Life often presents us with situations similar to a marathon. When you receive a word from God, it's like the rush of the gun blasts, signaling the start. Then you enter the stretch before the finish line, and the rush gradually fades. That is the time you will need endurance. Between what God tells you now, and it's fulfillment, there is a waiting period. Between your dream and its fulfillment; between hope and fulfillment, there is a waiting period.

In order to survive in that waiting period so that you can receive what you are expecting, you need endurance. Many people receive a promise of hope with excitement, but quickly lose their staying power as they wait for the fulfillment of their hopes. But if you endure, then you will live to have a testimony like some of the great stories of endurance found in the Bible.

Noah was in that space between hope and fulfillment. When God told him to construct an arc because there would be a flood, he built it, and then he waited. For 120 years, Noah waited for the flood God said would happen. He didn't give up, or curse God's word. He stayed faithful, and endured, and when the flood came his family was saved.

Abraham was also in a space between promise and fulfillment when at the

age of seventy-five, God told him that he would be the father of many nations. Abraham waited until he was 100 years old before he had a child. He endured twenty-five years of waiting, despite the fact that while he was waiting, he and his wife were both growing old. Abraham had to endure until the fulfillment of God's promise.

David waited as well, when he was anointed as king, but for seventeen years had to hide from Saul. He was constantly running for his life as a refugee in a strange land, sometimes even pretending to be a mad man, when he knew in his heart that he was destined to be a king. David needed endurance to bear that phase between promise and fulfillment.

Hannah also endured, being married for a number of years without conceiving a child. In that space between promise and fulfillment, she had to tolerate the ridicule of her rival. It was endurance that allowed Hannah to receive Samuel.

And Nehemiah was in that same space between promise and fulfillment when Israel went into captivity, and God said they were going to return home, and for years they remained captive servants. Then, one day Nehemiah received news that took him back to the land of Israel, where he rebuilt their wall.

The lesson in all of these examples is that between your promise and the fulfillment of that promise, you will need endurance. May this booklet give you guidance, so that you may endure and receive the reward God has destined for you.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ENDURE?

Endurance is the capacity to last or withstand pressure. When we say somebody has endurance, it means they are able to last; they are able to go the distance; they have staying power, and they are able to withstand pressure.

Endurance is three basic things:

Endurance is the ability to tolerate challenging or unpleasant circumstances without giving up. Many times in life between your promise, your hope, or your expectation and its fulfillment, there will be the temptation to give up. But endurance is the ability to put up with things without giving up.

Endurance is the ability to prevail over challenges . He who endures is one who is able to overcome. If you have endurance, then you can survive in that nebulous space of waiting for a promise to become a reality. It is when the excitement of the promise is over, and you've gotten into the tedium of the waiting, that you need endurance the most.

Five areas that we need to endure, in order to receive God's promises:

1. Endure hardship
2. Endure hostility
3. Endure temptations
4. Endure delays
5. Endure until the end

These are five conditions that we commonly have to contend with in the space between receiving a promise from God, and the time that He fulfills that promise. Many of you are in that space right now. Like David, you *know* you have been given a promise; you *know* what you believe is going to happen, but it has not happened yet. You are wondering: *Should I give up? Should I do something else? What is happening with my life?* You don't need to change course or

question; you simply need to endure. In the following chapters, we will discuss each of these five conditions that we must endure.

CHAPTER 2

ENDURE HARDSHIP

The first kind of endurance we need is the ability to **endure hardship** . In 2 Timothy 2: 3-4, the Apostle Paul encourages the young man, Timothy, to have the endurance of a soldier. He says,

³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Here, hardship is not just about difficulty, but this kind of hardship is about disciplined training. It's interesting that in this passage the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a soldier's endurance as the kind we must have. The scripture encourages us to have a military mindset as a way to endure.

Most of us have not experienced military training, so let me explain. I was once on the verge of enlisting in the military. In fact, I and my very good friend at that time were both going to enlist. Ultimately, he did, and he's a big shot in the Navy now. I was planning to go to the Air Force, but changed my mind because I couldn't reconcile being a soldier with my calling to become a pastor. I looked at the situation, and said by the time I become a pastor I'll be too old, so I let it go.

After my friend had enlisted and returned home, he had changed. First his hairstyle had changed. He told me that the first thing they do to begin your training is cut your hair. He talked about the strict regiment they had to follow; when to sleep, when to wake up, when to eat, and for how long. He described quite a pressured lifestyle. When you go into the military, the military has a specific mindset. The primary thing the military wants to do is to remove fear from you and insert courage. They want to make sure that you will not think of your individual protection, but of the protection of others. They take a person who acts in self-interest, and helps him think and act in the interest of his country. They take a person who lives following his own routine, to now follow a regimented structure.

The Bible says we must have a military kind of mindset, and the discipline of

a soldier in order to endure. And how do we do that?

Adjust To A Life Of Disciplined Routines And Habits.

Your habits determine your destiny. Your routines are the engines that drive your life. If you are going to endure, you have to have a disciplined habit. I think that's what my friend was trying to communicate to me; that when you enter the military they try to change your civilian habits. Your habit of eating is a prime example. When civilians want to eat, they wash their hands nicely, sit down comfortably, place a napkin on their lap, choose their cutlery, smell the aroma of the food, and start cutting and conversing. However, as a soldier in the field, by the time you go through that process, a bullet will be in your head. The military trains you to eat as quickly as possible, so you can get on with the rest of your duty. They have to change all these habits, because your habits will determine your destiny. If you are going to endure, there are going to be changes in habits and in your routine.

A routine is something you do the same way, every time. It's the engine. When a car is driving, the driver sparks the car, and the moment he sparks the car, he puts an engine into process. The engine is a routine. The pistons start working, injecting fuel, powering the system and causing the motor to run. It's a routine and it goes on and on and on. The driver is not even aware of it, but it's a routine. When the routine stops, the engine stops.

Your heart also follows a routine; it contracts to pump blood through your veins, over and over again. If your heart gets tired of routine, you will die, because the routine is what keeps your body alive.

Every human being must have something he does all the time; through thick and thin. It's a routine and that is the engine that will fuel your life. If you abandon the routines of your life, you cannot endure the hardships.

Build Mental And Physical Capacity To Stand Pressure.

The way you think; the way you feel; the way you process what is going on around you—all of these have to do with the mind and mental discipline. I like people who are mentally disciplined. Somebody who goes through hardship, but doesn't allow it to dictate their outlook or their lives impresses me.

Imagine a soldier caught in enemy territory. He's hiding behind a wall. The enemy is a few meters away, but the wall is concealing him. All of a sudden a cockroach drops on his head, and starts crawling down his forehead, around his

eyes, over his nostrils; it crawls, around his lips, goes into his ears, and then disappears into his shirt. If he wants to live, he must let the cockroach have its liberty. For him to do that, and not react the way we would react while watching TV on our sofa, screaming and squirming, shaking the cockroach off of us, he must have mental discipline. His mind must be in control of the event, because at that time, his options are between the discomfort of a cockroach on his face, or the bullet of an enemy in his head. For him to survive, he must tell his mind: *mind, you are mine, you are under my control, and at this time, you will not allow me to act in a way that will betray me to my enemies and cause me to be killed .*

Remember, your mind is yours. It's not your father's; it's not your brother's. Your mind is yours. Your brain is in your head alone, not in anybody else's. The processes of your brain are yours; they're not for anybody else. So take charge of your mind. Because if you don't, your mind will play games with your life and destroy you in the end.

Many crises we face are merely mind games. If you don't know how to deal with mind games, you cannot endure hardship. If you cannot live a disciplined life and control your mind, between the time of your promise and the fulfillment of it, you will lose the promise God has given you. You must learn to endure hardship.

CHAPTER 3

ENDURE HOSTILITY

Secondly, we have to be able to **endure hostility**. Hostility has to do with unfriendliness and antagonism. In a sense, hostility is also a military term. Hostile is a military term that is used to describe an opponent targeted for elimination. In life, many people will see you as an opponent, and they will be hostile towards you. Life in general, can be very harsh and hostile.

I think we all learned that lesson the day we were born. When you come out from the safety of your mother's womb. Though you've never used your lungs before, all of a sudden, you cannot live on Mommy's any longer; you have to breathe on your own, and that shock is what makes us cry our first cry. It's not excitement. Your parents are happy, saying, *oh, he cried*. He's not crying because he is happy; he's shocked! The child is screaming, thinking, *what world is this?* But of course the child survives, because right from the start, we have to learn to endure hostility.

In Hebrews 12: 3-4, we are told about Jesus and how he also endured hostility. It says,

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Jesus endured hostility from people all around him.

Hostility can come in different forms. It can come as ridicule., rejection, or as threats; sometimes it's treachery; sometimes it's pure blackmail. While you are waiting for your promise, you must be able to endure hostility, and not be drawn into retaliation. For in retaliating, you may commit sins that will block your blessings.

The hostility against Jesus started before he was even born and spanned his entire life. It continued throughout his childhood and during the time his ministry. There were hostile forces against him during his temptation by Satan, and in his encounters with people. Everywhere Jesus went, somebody wanted to destroy or silence him. The world was a very hostile place towards Jesus, and

eventually, that hostility led to his death. The redemption we hold on to is that, despite the hostility he faced, and the duration of that hostility, God raised him up again.

Learn To Deal With Rejection And Contradictory Evidence.

No matter who you are, there will be people who will reject you. If you are looking for acceptance in this world, you came to the wrong planet. Go to Mars, where there is nobody there to reject you. But if you found your way to planet Earth, get ready for rejection. People will reject you for many reasons; some because they are intimidated by you; some because they feel insecure; some because they think you don't measure up. They might think you're not talented, beautiful, or smart enough. You will be rejected, no matter who you are. If you are nice, you will be rejected. If you are mean, you will be rejected. Whether you are handsome or ugly, someone will reject you. Somebody somewhere is going to say, *who does he think he is?* It's called rejection, and it's an unpleasant part of life.

Don't place your value in the opinion of others. If you see yourself as God sees you, and seek only His validation, though you will see that others reject you, you will not be deeply affected by it. It may hurt or disappoint you temporarily, but it will not destroy you.

Along with rejection, you also have to deal with contradiction. When the reality of your life doesn't correspond with your expectation—that's hostility towards your self-perception and self-esteem. In your heart you believe you are great, but your surroundings tell you, you are average. When in your heart you believe you are the head, but your reality is that you are the tail. It's a contradiction that you must bear until it is reconciled.

It is a matter of perspective and what you choose to focus on. Rather than dwell on what you lack, spend time counting your blessings, as the saying goes. When you have gratitude flowing through you, you begin to notice more things to be grateful for. Likewise, when what you lack fills your mind, more voids will appear in your life. So while you are waiting for what you believe to match what you see, spend that time in the bliss of gratitude, rather than the misery of want.

Along with contradiction, people will underestimate you. It's another form of hostility. The teller at the bank will speak to you as if you have only one brain cell in your head; your acquaintances will appear shocked when you land that big contract. Expect to be underestimated by people along the way, but keep

your eyes set on what God says you are, and you will endure.

Jesus endured more than most of us can imagine. He is the Son of God, yet he was treated like a criminal. Can you imagine if you were the Son of God, you have the power to call down angels for reinforcement, and you are nailed between two thieves? In your heart you know you are the Son of God. In your heart you know you have power, but around you people are mocking you as if you are a low life. They are rejecting you, and even the thief has the audacity to insult you. This is what Jesus endured. Yet in the midst of such degradation, he had the discipline not to respond. It's called endurance, and we must all learn to develop it as Jesus did.

If you're going to respond to everybody who rejects you, you'll be writing too many rejoinders, spending the rest of your life explaining yourself, and be distracted from fulfilling your dream. If they reject you or underestimate you, you must do as Jesus did, and deal with it.

The Bible says Jesus went to his own, and his own rejected him. But as many who rejected him also received him. That's the good thing about it. While people are rejecting you, there are just as many people who want to receive you.

Don't spend your energy trying to please those who reject you. Spend your time and effort towards those who will receive you. One man might say you are ugly, but another one will see you as the most beautiful woman in the world. Focus on that one, rather than chasing the approval of the nay-sayer. It is a better use of your time because you can usually never please the people who reject you. Don't try to please them, but learn to deal with their rejection without making their opinion of you your concern.

It's a hostile world. Don't be naïve; going through life thinking people are as harmless as you would like them to be. Even harmless people can turn ugly and destructive when their security is threatened. Animal behaviorists tell us that usually when snakes bite, it's not because they are vicious, but because they feel threatened. You've come to their space and they feel you want to harm them, so they bite.

Even nice, good people can bite when they feel threatened. Just get to a position at work and threaten the person who was there before you. Let's say the person is not doing a good job, and you perform better. You will see that otherwise nice co-worker—the person everybody says is the nicest man in the office—all of a sudden become malicious because he feels threatened.

As harmless as you are; as nice and kind and gentle as you are, somebody might be wishing you were out of the way, because your presence is an obstruction to what they want to achieve. It's a hostile world, but you have to endure hostility.

CHAPTER 4

ENDURE TEMPTATION

The third thing you must endure is you have to **endure temptation**. A temptation is an attraction that leads you outside of the path God has set for you. It could be a temptation to commit a physical sin, like adultery or violence. It could also be a temptation to commit a mental sin, like doubt, worry, and pessimism. No matter the specific case, between your promise and its fulfillment, you have to endure those temptations.

Life is full of temptations. Temptations have brought many high and mighty people down. In recent years, one of the most beloved sports icons of our time has been virtually destroyed by his submission to temptation. He wasn't one of the "bad boys" of the sports world; he was really loved and admired by everybody. He has a nice, calm persona, and seems like a true gentleman on the outside. Well, you are no true gentleman if your wife is chasing you, swinging a golf club at your head. This man was fooling around. All of a sudden, the whole world is focusing—not on his profession, but on his indiscretions. Not on his skills in his game, but in other games.

Here is somebody, who has reached the pinnacle of success, brought down by temptation. I don't know how the story is going to pan out. I hope that there will be some redemption somehow for him. We've seen presidents, icons, leaders, rich people, pastors, men, and women, all fall simply because some temptation came their way and they couldn't endure it.

Unfortunately, temptation does not come from outside, it comes from within us. The enemy is not out there somewhere; it lies dormant in our hearts, in our minds, and in our thoughts. While we are waiting for our promise, those temptations will rise out of their dormant state and challenge us. The question is: how to deal with them?

In James 1:12 we are told,

¹² Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Blessed is the man, or the woman who endures, prevails and is able to withstand the pressures of temptation. When they prevail, they will be approved. You can be as hard as nuts and respond to the hostile forces, but if you can't deal with the temptation within you, between where you are and where you want to get to, you will take detours.

I think the greatest story of the Bible that illustrates this is the life of the great King David. He was a man of tremendous ability. He had a real love for God. He got himself into trouble and at first, somehow managed it. Then the problem got out of hand. Eventually it led to the destruction of his dynasty. Here is somebody that God had promised his descendants would rule forever, but the king that followed his reign was incompetent. Then his grandson, Rehoboam was worse than the previous one. And just two generations after David, the kingdom was divided. They didn't even hold the promise for four generations. Typically, the blessings of God are meant for the third and fourth generation. David only held two generations, and squandered his blessing with temptation.

Stay alert to sinful enticements and the seduction of pleasure. We have an enemy who always seeks to move us from the path God has set us on. The enemy comes with enticing offers that appeal to our physical needs, and our emotional weaknesses. Those enticements can shift our focus and dissipate our energies. Instead of spending your time strategically planning for your company, you spend it strategically planning how to avoid discovery by your wife. For a lot of men, their strategic planning is limited to how to make sure their wife doesn't catch them. They have almost become spymasters; figuring out how to erase text messages, or how to send encrypted ones. They are better than James Bond.

Meanwhile, they have a big company to run, but all their creativity is spent making sure they don't get caught. The enemy has successfully tempted that man into dissipating your energy, so he can begin to destroy him—his marriage, his business, his family, and his reputation. His energy and power of imagination is being successfully manipulated and misapplied. Temptation will dissipate your energy. It will dissipate you. Before you realize it, your energy is gone.

When you overcome temptation, you receive God's approval and promotion. He says He will approve those who overcome. Temptation is like a promotion test. Most of the time it comes on the verge of your promotion to the next level. When God is about to take you to another level, when God is about to bless you in an unprecedented way, the temptations will abound. Will you pass the test, and enter God's blessing, or fail it, squandering what He has promised you, for a

fleeting urge?

CHAPTER 5

ENDURE DELAYS

The fourth thing to **endure is delays**. Who likes delays? Nobody likes delays. When we want something, we want it now. In a way, we are all like little children. Have you ever made a promise to your child? Children have no concept of time. You tell them you're going to take them to the zoo next week. Five minutes later, they come to you and ask, *when are we going to the zoo?* You repeat to them, *next week*, and they ask, *when is next week?* You explain that next week is the day after tomorrow, after tomorrow, after tomorrow...it's today plus seven days. Then they come three minutes later and ask, *is it next week yet?*

Many times we do that when we are waiting. We don't want to wait. God makes a promise and today it's very easy to talk about it with determined faith, enthusiasm and expectation. But three weeks later, when the enthusiasm has worn off because the promise has not been fulfilled, we get impatient and begin to display the same antsy behavior, like our children waiting for next week to come. We doubt, we question, we become preoccupied with the time going by.

Three weeks, or even three years is nothing compared to the time that Abraham waited. Can you imagine being seventy-five years old when God tells you you're going to have children? If you are cheeky, you may want to ask God, *so where were you when I was twenty-five?* Then you turn seventy-six: no children. Seventy-seven: no children. You begin to question God, saying, *It seems obvious that You won't give me children, so why did you promise them to me?* Had Abraham done that, he would have robbed himself of the significance God was about to place on his life, and his lineage.

Delays are very tough to endure. When you've been promised it will be ok, but ok is not happening, it is hard to remain faithful; but you must. When Saul became king, Samuel promised him that he was going to fight the Philistines. Samuel says, wait until I come and make a sacrifice to the Lord before you engage in combat. The Philistines gathered, and Samuel wasn't around. Saul's army was getting impatient. They began to doubt Samuel's anointing, saying he's not even a soldier, and doesn't understand military exigencies. They pressured Saul into doing the sacrifice himself so they could begin the battle.

Saul tried to hold out for Samuel, but they put so much pressure on him, he couldn't endure. He was reluctant, and as soon as he finished the sacrifice, Samuel returned.

What Samuel said to Saul when he discovered what had been done is very instructive for us. He said to Saul, *On this day the Lord would have magnified you in the sight of all your enemies, had you been patient, but you didn't endure. Now, instead this day will go down in history as the day your kingdom was taken away from you.* Delays are never pleasant because we always want things right now. But, we have to endure.

Hebrews 6: 13 and 15 says,

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself... ¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Abraham patiently endured. You and I know that he also missed it by a bit. Because while Abraham was waiting, the pressure was mounting, and he had a second opinion from a respected expert. Now when a respected expert gives you a way out, sometimes it's easy to obey. In this case, the respected expert was his wife. If your wife tells you it's ok, go and chase the girls, I'm sure most of you men will say *Hallelujah!* So his wife Sarah says, "Listen, God said *you* will be the father of many nations, not me, so maybe the promise is only for you. Go and impregnate Hagar. Let her be a surrogate for us, and the child will be mine." So Abraham goes and has a child with Hagar. And God says, *that's not what I said. I also spoke concerning Sarah. I said she will also be a mother of nations just like you.* Well they waited and they had the child, but their blessing was tarnished. The mistake they made in their impatience is still following them, four thousand years later.

If you can't endure delay, the things you give birth to in your impatience will haunt you. Resist the urge to make hasty, short-term choices. It happens to all of us when we are waiting, there is pressure—pressure of time.

Let's say there's an appointment. You are waiting in traffic, you feel like using the side of the road. It's a shortcut; all the taxis are using it. You go by the side road and you meet not just traffic, but a big gutter that you can't even cross. Then other people who followed you are behind you. And now you can't go forward, and you can't go backwards. The time you were trying to save is lost and you have no chance of a shortcut any longer.

Resist the pressure of making hasty short-term choices. Allow the Holy Spirit to turn your waiting period into a maturing period. While waiting don't pick up wrong habits. Use your waiting period to pray, to seek God, to trust Him, to look upon Him. Let Him build character into you. Let Christ be formed in you while you are waiting. You may not have what you want now, but while you are waiting for it, can you allow God to work on you? Are there things in your life that God must correct? Are there things in your life that must change? Allow Him to do it, and endure the wait.

CHAPTER 6

ENDURE TO THE END

Finally, we must **endure to the end**. God has not called us to endure part of the time, or momentarily. He has called us to hold on until the end of our assignment so that we can take hold of the reward of our faith. In Matthew 24: 13 Jesus says,

¹³ But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

It doesn't say, he who endures part way, but he who endures to the end. James 5:11 also says,

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.

Notice the italicized text that emphasizes the end that is *intended by God*. This is important. Have you ever noticed that when you rely on God, many times He gives you an outcome *better* than the one you were praying for? Have full confidence in God's faithfulness while you are waiting. He's a faithful God. Rely on the Holy Spirit's strength moment by moment because waiting is very frustrating.

While you are waiting, remember to keep your eyes focused on Christ and your eternal reward. After all is said and done, it's not just what you achieve here on earth, but what you achieve eternally that is important. You can achieve great goals here on earth, but why should they come at the expense of your relationship with God? Avoid becoming great here on earth but insignificant spiritually. We must endure to the end.

As Christians, we stay in this walk with God to the end. Even if God doesn't bless us, we will worship Him. If things don't turn out the way we want, we will still serve God. If we get disappointed along the way, our faith will still be in God. We may not fully understand why things happen. We may not fully understand why we don't get the things we desire, but one thing is sure, there is

a God. His name is Jehovah; He is eternal, and His power is awesome. He is faithful. He is good and His mercies endure forever. In spite of our experience, God is good. In spite of our disappointment, God is good. In spite of the pressure on our lives, God is good. At the end of the story, your faith in God must remain in tact.

If God blesses you with long life and you are ninety years old or ninety-five years old, looking back at your life, don't count the houses and the cars, or the children, or professional accolades you had. Count whether you made it to your old age with your faith in tact. Is Christ still your Lord? Are you still a child of God; still serving Him? Is the Holy Spirit still your Lord and Master until the end? Because what shall it profit you to have long life and lose your faith? It's of no consequence.

We endure not just to get things here on earth, but we endure to meet God's approval in eternity. So when we stand before Him, He will say "well done, good and faithful servant, you went through the fire, you didn't give up; the waters flooded you, you didn't give up; you went through earthquakes, you didn't give up; you were rejected, you didn't give up; your hopes and expectations were not met, but you didn't give up."

The Bible says many of the saints of old believed God, but never saw what they were believing God for. The subject of their prayers never became a reality in their time, but they all died in faith. Hold on to your faith, through thick, through thin, through water, through flood, through fire, through adversity. Don't let your faith fail. Endure hardship as a soldier. Learn to endure hostility. Be able to endure temptation; and endure delays. But most of all, endure until the end. May God bless you. Amen.