THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Carrying the Cross Without Losing Heart

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

The Danger Is Not the Weight

When a man first takes up a heavy cross, a chronic illness, a long grief, a wearing burden, a prolonged trial, the danger he fears is that the weight will crush him. But the real danger, for most men, is not the weight itself but something subtler and more corrosive: the slow loss of heart, the gradual draining away of hope and courage under the long pressure of a burden that will not lift. A man can bear a great weight for a short time; what breaks him is the long carrying, the weeks and months and years of a cross that does not go away, and the discouragement that seeps in and whispers that it will never end, that there is no point, that he cannot go on.

This book is about not losing heart, about carrying a heavy and prolonged cross over the long haul without being worn down into discouragement and despair. It assumes that a man knows the meaning of suffering and the hope of the cross, and it addresses the practical, day-to-day reality of endurance, the question not of what suffering means but of how to keep going when the meaning is clear but the weight remains, how to carry a cross for the long distance without collapsing under the discouragement that long carrying breeds. The aim is to put in a man's hands the practical helps for endurance, the concrete means of not losing heart, so that he can carry even a heavy and lasting cross all the way to the end without being broken by the discouragement that is its deadliest danger.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. — 2 Corinthians 4:16

We will begin by facing honestly the reality of discouragement, the losing of heart that long suffering threatens. We will take up the practical discipline of carrying the cross one day at a time. We will address the dark seasons when God himself seems absent. We will learn the practice of honest lament, pouring out one's heart to God. We will see why a man must not carry his cross alone. We will consider how to keep hope alive by fixing one's eyes on the goal. And we will arrive at the perseverance that carries a man all the way to the end, and the crown that awaits those who do not give up.

CHAPTER ONE

When the Heart Grows Weary

Facing the Reality of Discouragement

The first thing a man carrying a long cross must do is face honestly the reality of discouragement, the weariness of heart that long suffering breeds, for the man who does not expect it or understand it is ambushed by it, while the man who faces it clearly can meet it. Discouragement is not a sign of weak faith or failure but a normal and predictable effect of prolonged suffering, and understanding it rightly is the first step to not being overcome by it. Facing the reality of discouragement, understanding the weariness of heart that long suffering produces, equips a man to meet it rather than being blindsided by it.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. — Psalm 42:11

Discouragement Is Normal

The first truth to grasp is that discouragement under long suffering is normal, a predictable human response to prolonged burden, not a sign of weak faith or spiritual failure, so that a man need not add guilt to his discouragement by supposing it means something is wrong with his faith. Long suffering wearies the heart, and the discouragement, the weariness, the cast-down soul that the Psalmist describes are normal responses to prolonged burden, experienced even by the holiest, and not evidence of weak faith or failure. The man who supposes that his discouragement means his faith is failing adds a false guilt to his suffering, compounding his burden, while the man who understands that discouragement is a normal response to long suffering can meet it without this added guilt. Even the Psalmist, a man of deep faith, cried out at his cast-down soul, and the great saints knew discouragement in their long sufferings, so that a man need not be ashamed of his weariness of heart or take it as a sign of spiritual failure. Discouragement is normal, a predictable response to long suffering rather than a sign of weak faith, and the man who understands this can meet his weariness of heart without adding the false guilt of supposing it means his faith is failing, for even the Psalmist and the saints knew the cast-down soul under prolonged burden.

Name It Honestly

The way to begin meeting discouragement is to name it honestly, to acknowledge the weariness and discouragement rather than denying or suppressing it, for the discouragement named and faced can be addressed, while the discouragement denied festers in the dark. There is a false piety that denies discouragement, that pretends a suffering man is fine, that suppresses the weariness as though admitting it were a failure of faith, but this denial only drives the discouragement underground where it festers,

while honest acknowledgment brings it into the light where it can be addressed. The Psalmist models this honest naming, speaking plainly to his own soul about its cast-down state, and the man carrying a long cross does well to follow him, acknowledging his discouragement honestly to himself and to God rather than denying it. This honest naming of discouragement, rather than its suppression, is the first step to meeting it, for only the discouragement faced can be addressed. Name it honestly, acknowledging the weariness and discouragement rather than denying or suppressing it, and a man takes the first step to meeting it, for the discouragement named and faced can be addressed while the discouragement denied festers in the dark, and the honest naming of one's cast-down soul, as the Psalmist models, brings it into the light where it can be met.

Discouragement Is Not the End

Finally, a man must understand that discouragement, however heavy, is not the end, not a permanent state but a passing one, and that the discouraged man can still hope, still go on, still come through, for discouragement is a feeling to be endured and not a verdict to be believed. The great danger of discouragement is that it presents itself as final, as a verdict that there is no hope and no point in going on, but this is a lie, for discouragement is a passing feeling and not a permanent state, and the discouraged man can still hope in God, as the Psalmist did even in his turmoil, commanding his soul to hope. The man carrying a long cross must therefore not believe the verdict that discouragement pronounces, must not take his weariness as a final word, but must recognize it as a passing feeling to be endured and come through, still hoping in God even in the depths of discouragement. Discouragement is not the end but a passing season, and the man who refuses to believe its false verdict of hopelessness can go on through it to hope again. Discouragement is not the end, not a permanent state or a final verdict but a passing feeling to be endured, and the man carrying a long cross must refuse to believe the hopelessness that discouragement pronounces, recognizing it as a passing season to be come through rather than a verdict to be believed, and hoping in God even in its depths as the Psalmist did.

CHAPTER TWO

One Day at a Time

Not Carrying the Whole Weight at Once

One of the most practical secrets of carrying a long cross without losing heart is to carry it one day at a time, refusing to shoulder all at once the whole imagined weight of the

future, which no one could bear. Much of the discouragement of long suffering comes not from the weight of the present day, which is usually bearable, but from the crushing imagined weight of all the days to come, the endless future of the burden, which overwhelms. Learning to carry the cross one day at a time, bearing only today's portion rather than the whole future at once, is among the most important practical disciplines of endurance.

Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. — Matthew 6:34

The Future Is the Crushing Weight

The crushing weight in long suffering is usually not the present day but the future, the imagined endlessness of the burden, the prospect of all the days and weeks and years of carrying it, which overwhelms a man who tries to bear it all at once. Today's portion of a long cross is usually bearable, but when a man adds to it the imagined weight of the whole future, the endless days ahead of the same burden, the total becomes crushing, and it is this imagined future weight, far more than the present day, that breeds despair. The man suffering a chronic illness is usually able to bear today's pain, but the thought of a lifetime of it overwhelms; the man in a long grief can bear today's sorrow, but the prospect of endless years of it crushes. This imagined future weight is the crushing burden, and recognizing that it, rather than the present day, is what overwhelms is the key to the discipline of carrying the cross one day at a time. The future is the crushing weight, for today's portion of a long cross is usually bearable while the imagined weight of all the days to come overwhelms, and recognizing that it is the future rather than the present that crushes is the key to the discipline of carrying the cross one day at a time, bearing only today's bearable portion rather than the unbearable whole.

Just Today

The practical discipline is to carry just today, to bear only the present day's portion of the cross and to refuse to carry tomorrow's, trusting, as Christ counseled, that tomorrow will take care of itself and that today's trouble is sufficient for today. Christ explicitly counseled against carrying tomorrow's burden today, teaching that each day's trouble is sufficient for that day and that one should not be anxious about tomorrow, and this is precisely the discipline of carrying a long cross, bearing only today's portion and declining to shoulder the future. The man who learns to carry just today, to say to himself that he need only get through this one day and not the whole imagined future, finds that today is bearable, and that by carrying only one day at a time he can carry a cross whose imagined whole would crush him. This bearing of just today, this refusal to carry

tomorrow's weight along with today's, is the practical heart of carrying a long cross, breaking the crushing whole into bearable single days. Just today, bearing only the present day's portion of the cross and refusing to carry tomorrow's, is the practical discipline of enduring a long cross, for the man who carries only one day at a time finds today bearable and can carry a cross whose imagined whole would crush him, trusting as Christ counseled that tomorrow will take care of itself.

Today's Grace for Today

The deepest ground for carrying the cross one day at a time is that God gives today's grace for today, supplying the strength needed for each day as it comes rather than all at once, so that a man has the grace for today but not yet for the imagined future. God's grace is given day by day, as the manna in the wilderness was given daily and could not be stored, and this means a man has the grace he needs for today's portion of his cross but does not yet have, and does not need, the grace for the future he is trying to carry in advance. This is why carrying the future is so crushing, for a man tries to bear tomorrow's burden with only today's grace, feeling the weight of the future without yet having the grace that will come with it; but when tomorrow comes, so will tomorrow's grace, sufficient for tomorrow's portion. The man who understands that today's grace is given for today, and that each day's grace will come with each day, can carry the cross one day at a time in the confidence that the grace he needs will always be there when the day arrives. Today's grace for today, God's supply of strength for each day as it comes rather than all at once, is the deepest ground for carrying the cross one day at a time, for a man has the grace he needs for today's portion but not yet for the future he tries to carry in advance, and when each day comes, so will its grace, sufficient for its portion.

CHAPTER THREE

When God Seems Absent

Enduring the Dark Seasons

Among the hardest trials of a long cross is the season when God himself seems absent, when prayer goes dry, heaven seems silent, and the sufferer feels abandoned by the very God he is trying to trust, and enduring these dark seasons is a particular challenge of carrying the cross without losing heart. These seasons of felt abandonment are real and common, experienced even by the saints and by Christ himself on the cross, and understanding how to endure them is essential. Facing the dark seasons when God seems

absent, and learning to endure them, equips a man to carry his cross through even the felt absence of God.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? — Psalm 13:1

The Felt Absence Is Real

The first thing to understand is that the felt absence of God in suffering is real and common, experienced by the holiest souls and by Christ himself, so that a man enduring it need not conclude that God has truly abandoned him or that his own faith has failed. The sense that God is absent, that prayer is dry and heaven silent, that one is alone in one's suffering, is a real and common experience, described throughout the Psalms, endured by great saints in their dark nights, and voiced by Christ himself on the cross crying out that he was forsaken. This felt absence is not the same as real abandonment, for God does not actually abandon the sufferer, but the feeling of abandonment is real and must be reckoned with, and the man who experiences it need not conclude that God has truly left him or that his faith has failed. Understanding that the felt absence of God is a real and common experience, not a sign of true abandonment or failed faith, is the first step to enduring the dark seasons. The felt absence of God is real and common, experienced by the holiest souls and by Christ on the cross, and the man enduring it need not conclude that God has truly abandoned him or that his faith has failed, for the feeling of abandonment, real as it is, is not the same as real abandonment, which God never does to the sufferer who trusts him.

Faith Beyond Feeling

The way to endure the felt absence of God is by a faith that goes beyond feeling, that continues to trust and cling to God even when he cannot be felt, holding to what faith knows to be true despite what feeling says. In the dark seasons a man must learn to live by faith rather than feeling, to trust that God is present and faithful even when he cannot be felt, to cling to what faith knows, that God does not abandon his own, despite what feeling says, that God is absent. This faith beyond feeling is harder than the faith of consoled seasons, for it must hold to God in the dark, without the support of felt presence, trusting bare and unfelt, but it is also a deeper and more mature faith, proven and purified precisely by the absence of feeling. The man who learns to trust God beyond feeling, to cling to him in the dark seasons when he cannot be felt, endures the felt absence by a faith that does not depend on feeling, and emerges with a faith deepened and purified by the darkness. Faith beyond feeling, continuing to trust and cling to God even when he cannot be felt, is how a man endures the dark seasons, holding to what

faith knows despite what feeling says, and though this faith in the dark is harder than the faith of consoled seasons, it is also deeper and more mature, proven and purified precisely by the absence of feeling.

The Dark Season Will Pass

Finally, a man enduring the felt absence of God must hold to the truth that the dark season will pass, that the felt absence is not permanent but a season to be endured, after which God's felt presence returns, so that he must simply hold on through the dark until the light returns. The dark seasons of felt abandonment, however long and painful, are seasons and not permanent states, and they pass, giving way again to the felt presence of God, so that the man enduring one must hold to the truth that it will end, that he must simply endure through the darkness until the light returns. The Psalmist who cried out how long moved, by the end of his psalm, to renewed trust and praise, and the dark nights of the saints gave way to deeper union; the dark season is a passage, not a destination. The man who holds to this truth, that the dark season will pass, can endure it, simply holding on through the felt absence in the confidence that it will end and God's felt presence return, rather than despairing as though the darkness were permanent. The dark season will pass, for the felt absence of God is a season to be endured and not a permanent state, and the man enduring it must hold to the truth that it will end and God's felt presence return, simply holding on through the darkness in the confidence that it is a passage and not a destination, as the Psalmist's cry of how long gave way at last to renewed trust.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Prayer of Lament

Pouring Out Your Heart to God

One of the most powerful and most neglected helps for carrying a cross without losing heart is the prayer of lament, the honest pouring out of one's pain, grief, and even complaint to God, which Scripture not only permits but models throughout the Psalms. Many Christians suppose that faith requires suppressing their pain before God, presenting only praise and never complaint, but this is a misunderstanding, for Scripture is full of honest lament, and the suppression of pain before God cuts a man off from a vital help. Understanding and practicing the prayer of lament, the honest pouring out of one's heart to God, gives a man a powerful means of enduring his cross.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. — Psalm 62:8

God Can Handle Your Honesty

The first thing to grasp is that God can handle a man's honest pain and complaint, that he is not offended by honest lament but invites it, so that a man need not suppress his pain before God but can pour it out honestly. Many Christians suppose they must present only praise and gratitude to God, suppressing their pain, grief, and complaint as though these would offend him, but this is a misunderstanding, for God is not fragile or offended by honest emotion but invites a man to pour out his heart, pain and all, and can fully handle a man's honest lament. The Psalms, the very prayer book of Scripture, are full of honest lament, of complaint, grief, and even protest poured out to God, which shows that such honest prayer is not a failure of faith but a form of it, and that God welcomes the honest pouring out of a troubled heart. The man who understands that God can handle his honesty is freed to bring his real pain to God rather than suppressing it, which is both more honest and more healing. God can handle your honesty, for he is not offended by honest pain and complaint but invites a man to pour out his heart, and the Psalms full of honest lament show that such prayer is a form of faith rather than a failure of it, so that a man need not suppress his pain before God but can bring it honestly, which is both more truthful and more healing than a forced praise that hides the heart.

Lament Is Faith, Not Faithlessness

It is crucial to see that honest lament is an act of faith rather than its opposite, for the man who pours out his pain and complaint to God is still turning to God, still in relationship with him, still trusting him enough to be honest, which is faith and not faithlessness. It might seem that complaining to God, crying out in pain and protest, is a failure of faith, but the opposite is true, for the man who laments to God is bringing his pain to God rather than away from him, is still in relationship and still trusting, which is precisely faith; it is the man who turns away from God in his pain, not the one who cries out to him, who has lost faith. The Psalmists who lamented most honestly were men of deep faith, and their lament was an expression of that faith, a turning to God in their pain rather than away from him, a trusting of him enough to be honest. The man who laments honestly to God is therefore exercising faith, not abandoning it, and he need not fear that his honest pain and complaint are faithless, for they are a form of faith, a bringing of his real self to the God he trusts. Lament is faith, not faithlessness, for the man who pours out his pain and complaint to God is still turning to him, still trusting him enough to be honest, which is faith and not its opposite, and the deeply faithful Psalmists who

lamented most honestly show that honest lament is an expression of faith, a turning to God in pain rather than away from him.

Lament Leads Back to Trust

Finally, honest lament, rightly practiced, leads back to trust, for the pouring out of pain to God is not an end in itself but a movement that, having honestly expressed the pain, comes back to hope and trust, as the laments of the Psalms characteristically do. The prayer of lament is not meant to end in complaint but to move through it, to pour out the pain honestly and then, having expressed it, to return to trust and hope, as the Psalms of lament characteristically turn, by their end, from complaint to renewed trust and praise. This movement from honest lament back to trust is the full shape of the prayer of lament, which does not wallow in complaint but uses honest expression as a way through the pain back to hope, so that the lament becomes a means of enduring rather than a sinking into despair. The man who practices the prayer of lament rightly pours out his pain honestly and then lets it lead him back to trust, finding in the honest expression a release that opens the way back to hope. Lament leads back to trust, for the honest pouring out of pain to God is not an end in itself but a movement that, having expressed the pain, returns to hope and trust as the Psalms of lament characteristically do, so that the prayer of lament becomes a means of enduring, carrying a man through the honest expression of his pain back to the trust and hope on the other side.

CHAPTER FIVE

Do Not Carry It Alone

The Burden Shared

A heavy cross is far harder to carry alone, and one of the most important practical helps for not losing heart is to let others help carry the burden, refusing the isolation that long suffering tends to breed and allowing oneself to be supported by others. Suffering tends to isolate, and the suffering man often withdraws, carrying his cross alone, which multiplies its weight and hastens the loss of heart, while the shared burden is lighter and the supported sufferer endures better. Understanding why a man must not carry his cross alone, and how to let others help, is essential to enduring a long cross without losing heart.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. — Galatians 6:2

Suffering Isolates

The first thing to recognize is that suffering tends to isolate, that the suffering man often withdraws from others, hides his pain, and carries his cross alone, which multiplies its weight and hastens discouragement. Long suffering has a strong isolating tendency, for the sufferer often withdraws, not wanting to burden others, feeling that no one understands, hiding his pain behind a brave face, pulling away into a solitary carrying of his cross, and this isolation, far from helping, multiplies the burden's weight and hastens the loss of heart. The suffering man alone with his cross, cut off from support, bears a heavier burden than he need, for the isolation adds loneliness to suffering and removes the support that would help him endure. Recognizing this isolating tendency of suffering, and the harm it does, is the first step to resisting it and allowing oneself to be supported. Suffering isolates, for the suffering man tends to withdraw, hide his pain, and carry his cross alone, which multiplies its weight and hastens discouragement, and recognizing this isolating tendency and the harm it does is the first step to resisting it and allowing oneself the support that makes a heavy cross more bearable.

Let Others In

The remedy for the isolation of suffering is to let others in, to resist the tendency to withdraw and instead to share one's burden with trusted others who can support and help carry it, for the shared burden is lighter and the supported sufferer endures better. Against the isolating pull of suffering, a man must deliberately let others in, sharing his burden with trusted friends, family, or fellow believers, allowing them to know his pain, to support him, to help carry his cross, which both lightens the burden and provides the support that helps him endure. This letting others in requires overcoming the reluctance to burden others and the pride that hides pain, but it is essential, for the burden shared is genuinely lighter, and the sufferer surrounded by support endures far better than the one who carries his cross alone. Scripture commands the bearing of one another's burdens precisely because burdens are meant to be shared, and the suffering man who lets others help carry his cross both obeys this command and finds his burden more bearable. Let others in, resisting the tendency to withdraw and sharing your burden with trusted others who can support and help carry it, and a man finds his cross more bearable, for the shared burden is genuinely lighter and the supported sufferer endures better, so that letting others in, though it requires overcoming reluctance and pride, is essential to carrying a long cross without losing heart.

Accept the Help Offered

Finally, a man must learn to accept the help that is offered, overcoming the pride and self-sufficiency that make it hard to receive help, for the suffering man who cannot accept help cuts himself off from the support he needs. Many men find it hard to accept help,

preferring to be the strong one who helps others rather than the weak one who needs help, and this pride and self-sufficiency can make a suffering man refuse the support offered, insisting on carrying his cross alone out of an unwillingness to be dependent. But the suffering man needs help, and the refusal to accept it, out of pride or self-sufficiency, cuts him off from the support he needs and leaves him to carry alone a burden others would gladly help bear. The man carrying a long cross must therefore humble himself to accept help, overcoming the pride that makes receiving hard, allowing others to support him and help carry his cross, for accepting help is not weakness but the humility that endurance requires. Accept the help offered, overcoming the pride and self-sufficiency that make receiving hard, and a man allows himself the support he needs, for the suffering man who cannot accept help cuts himself off from the support that would sustain him, and the humility to receive help is not weakness but the very thing that endurance of a long cross requires.

CHAPTER SIX

Keep Your Eyes on the Goal

The Hope That Pulls You Forward

What finally keeps a man from losing heart under a long cross is hope, the keeping of his eyes fixed on the goal beyond the suffering, the hope that pulls him forward through the present pain toward the joy that awaits. The sufferer who looks only at his present burden loses heart, while the one who lifts his eyes to the hope beyond it finds the strength to endure, for hope is the engine of endurance. Understanding how to keep one's eyes on the goal, fixing one's hope on what lies beyond the suffering, gives a man the forward pull that carries him through a long cross without losing heart.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. — Hebrews 12:1-2

Fix Your Eyes Beyond the Pain

The practical key to hope is to fix one's eyes beyond the present pain on the goal that lies ahead, for the sufferer who looks only at his present burden is overwhelmed, while the one who lifts his gaze to the hope beyond finds the strength to endure. A man carrying a long cross can fix his attention on the present pain, which overwhelms and discourages, or he can lift his eyes beyond it to the hope that lies ahead, the joy, the glory, the end of suffering that awaits, and where he fixes his gaze largely determines whether he endures. Scripture counsels running the race by looking to Jesus, fixing the eyes on the goal and

the one who waits at the end rather than on the difficulty of the running, and this fixing of the eyes beyond the pain is the practical key to the hope that sustains endurance. The man who learns to lift his gaze from his present burden to the hope beyond it finds the strength to carry on, pulled forward by what he sees ahead rather than crushed by what he feels now. Fix your eyes beyond the pain, lifting your gaze from the present burden to the goal that lies ahead, and a man finds the strength to endure, for the sufferer who looks only at his present pain is overwhelmed while the one who fixes his eyes on the hope beyond is pulled forward by it, as Scripture counsels running the race by looking to Jesus rather than at the difficulty of the running.

Remember Where This Ends

A help in fixing one's eyes on the goal is to remember where the suffering ends, that for the Christian every cross ends in resurrection and glory, that the present suffering is not the final word but a passage toward a joy that will swallow it up. The Christian's suffering is set against the horizon of an eternal hope, the certainty that beyond every cross lies resurrection, that the present suffering, however long, ends at last in a glory that will more than compensate for it, and remembering this end gives a man the hope to endure. When a man remembers where his suffering ends, in the joy and glory of eternal life, the present burden is put in perspective, seen as a passage toward a good end rather than an endless darkness, and this remembrance fuels the hope that sustains endurance. The man who keeps before him the end of his suffering, the resurrection and glory that await, carries his cross in hope rather than despair, pulled forward by the joy set before him. Remember where this ends, that for the Christian every cross ends in resurrection and glory and the present suffering is a passage toward a joy that will swallow it up, and a man finds the hope to endure, for remembering the good end of his suffering puts the present burden in perspective as a passage rather than an endless darkness, fueling the hope that pulls him forward through the pain.

Hope Is a Choice

Finally, a man must understand that hope, under a long cross, is often a choice, a deliberate act of fixing one's mind on the grounds for hope rather than on the grounds for despair, which are both present, so that keeping hope alive requires the active choice to hope. Under long suffering, both hope and despair have their grounds, the discouraging weight of the present and the encouraging hope of the end, and which a man dwells on is often a choice, a deliberate directing of his mind to the grounds for hope rather than letting it sink into the grounds for despair. Hope is not merely a feeling that comes and goes but, under suffering, often a discipline, an active choice to fix one's mind on God's promises, on the end of suffering, on the grounds for hope, rather than on the

discouragement that presses in. The man who understands that hope is a choice can keep it alive even under a long cross, deliberately choosing to hope, directing his mind to the grounds for hope, refusing to let it sink into despair, so that his hope is sustained by active choice rather than left to the mercy of his feelings. Hope is a choice, a deliberate act of fixing one's mind on the grounds for hope rather than despair under a long cross, and the man who understands this can keep hope alive by actively choosing it, directing his mind to God's promises and the end of suffering rather than letting it sink into the discouragement that presses in, so that his hope is sustained by discipline rather than left to the mercy of his feelings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

All the Way to the End

The Perseverance That Wins the Crown

The whole of carrying a cross without losing heart comes down finally to perseverance, to carrying on all the way to the end without giving up, and to the crown that awaits those who do. What matters in the end is not that a man never struggled or was never discouraged, but that he persevered, that he did not give up, that he carried his cross all the way to the end. Understanding the perseverance that carries a man to the end, and the crown that awaits it, gives a man the final motive and the final encouragement to carry his cross without losing heart.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. — 2 Timothy 4:7

The Victory Is Perseverance

The first thing to grasp is that the victory in carrying a cross is perseverance itself, the not giving up, the carrying on to the end, so that a man wins not by never struggling but by never quitting. The victory Scripture holds out is not the avoidance of struggle or the absence of discouragement but the finishing of the race, the keeping of the faith to the end, the perseverance that carries on despite everything; Saint Paul's triumph was not that he never suffered but that he fought the good fight and finished the race. This means a man need not win by never being discouraged, never struggling, never wanting to give up, but by not giving up, by persevering through the struggle and discouragement all the way to the end, for the victory is in the perseverance itself. The man who understands that the victory is perseverance is freed from the false standard of a struggle-free endurance and set on the real goal, simply not quitting, carrying on to the end despite

everything. The victory is perseverance, the not giving up and carrying on to the end rather than the avoidance of struggle, so that a man wins not by never being discouraged but by never quitting, and understanding this frees him from the false standard of a struggle-free endurance and sets him on the real goal of simply not giving up, carrying his cross all the way to the end despite everything.

Just Don't Quit

The practical essence of perseverance is simply not quitting, continuing to carry on even when a man wants to give up, even through discouragement and struggle, for the one who does not quit, whatever his struggles, reaches the end. Perseverance is not a matter of feeling strong or never wanting to quit but of continuing to carry on despite the desire to quit, of putting one foot in front of the other, of simply not giving up, however discouraged, however weary, however much one wants to stop. The man who keeps going, who refuses to quit even when quitting is all he wants to do, perseveres, and perseverance, however difficult, however reluctant, however marked by struggle and the desire to stop, carries a man all the way to the end. This simple refusal to quit, maintained through all the discouragement and struggle, is the practical essence of perseverance, and it is within the reach of any man who will simply keep going, one day at a time, refusing to give up. Just don't quit, continuing to carry on even when you want to give up, and a man perseveres, for perseverance is not a matter of never wanting to quit but of not quitting despite the desire to, and the man who simply keeps going, refusing to give up however discouraged or weary, carries his cross all the way to the end through the simple, reluctant, struggling refusal to stop.

The Crown That Awaits

Finally, the man who perseveres to the end has the assurance of a crown, the promise that those who endure faithfully to the end will receive from God an eternal reward, so that his perseverance is not in vain but crowned. Scripture promises a crown to those who persevere, the crown of life to the one who remains steadfast under trial, the reward laid up for the one who finishes the race and keeps the faith, so that the man who carries his cross to the end without giving up has the assurance that his perseverance will be eternally crowned. This crown is the final encouragement to persevere, for it assures a man that his faithful endurance is not meaningless or in vain but seen by God and eternally rewarded, that the finishing of the race leads to a crown that makes every struggle worth it. The man who keeps this crown before him, the eternal reward promised to those who persevere, has a powerful motive to carry on to the end, knowing that his perseverance, however hard, leads to a crown that will more than repay it. The crown that awaits, the eternal reward promised to those who persevere faithfully to the

end, is the final assurance and encouragement of the man carrying a long cross, for his perseverance is not in vain but eternally crowned, and keeping before him the crown promised to those who finish the race gives him a powerful motive to carry on to the end, knowing that his faithful endurance leads to a reward that makes every struggle worth it.

CONCLUSION

Carry On

The danger in carrying a heavy cross is not finally the weight but the loss of heart, and this book has been about not losing heart, about carrying a long cross all the way to the end without being worn down into despair. We have seen that discouragement is a normal part of long suffering, to be faced rather than denied; that the cross is carried one day at a time, not all at once; that the dark seasons of God's felt absence are to be endured by faith beyond feeling; that honest lament is a powerful help; that the burden must not be carried alone; that hope, kept alive by fixing the eyes on the goal, is the engine of endurance; and that the victory is finally perseverance, which wins an eternal crown.

None of this removes the weight of the cross, which remains heavy, but it equips a man to carry it without losing heart, to endure even a long and heavy burden all the way to the end without being broken by the discouragement that is its deadliest danger. The man armed with these practical helps can carry a cross whose weight would otherwise wear him down, not because the weight is lighter but because he has learned how not to lose heart beneath it.

So carry on. Face your discouragement honestly without taking it as a verdict; carry your cross one day at a time, trusting today's grace for today; endure the dark seasons by a faith that goes beyond feeling; pour out your heart to God in honest lament; let others help you carry the burden; keep your eyes fixed on the hope beyond the pain; and above all, do not quit, but persevere all the way to the end. Do this, and you will carry even a heavy and lasting cross without losing heart, and you will come at last to the end of the race able to say, with Saint Paul, that you have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith, and there awaits you the crown that God gives to all who do not give up. Carry on, all the way to the end, and do not lose heart.

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