

# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 26, 2022 | Steadfastness

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine steadfastness in the life of Nehemiah.

### GETTING READY

How would you describe a steadfast person?

Read Nehemiah 1–6, 13.

Ask God to use Nehemiah to give you insights into steadfastness.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Nehemiah endured many challenges as he continued on the mission God gave him.

### ■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

If you are serious about serving God, you will encounter challenges that you must persevere through.

### ■ ■ MEDITATE

*“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the main idea of the lesson.

Q: *Who is the most steadfast person you know? Why?*

Q: *Why does the Christian faith demand steadfastness?*

The word “steadfast” in 2 Peter 1:6 translates the Greek word *hypomonē*. *Hypomonē* means the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty. It could also be translated as patience, endurance, fortitude, or perseverance. It is remarkable that one Greek word could contain all these nuances. Think about “patience” and “endurance.” These words could be defined with opposite terms. “Patience” refers to non-action over a period of time when you would rather be acting. “Endurance” refers to continued action over a period of time when you would rather not be acting. “Fortitude” has the nuance of standing firm against opposition. “Perseverance” has the nuance of continuing on against opposition. Thus, *hypomonē* is a very elastic term when translated into English. One easily overlooked component of it is “difficulty.” For there to be steadfastness, there must be difficulty. Peter knew his audience would experience difficult times, and he desired to see steadfastness of character when those difficulties arrived.

Q: *Why would someone choose the more difficult of two options?*

Q: *What sacrifices are you making that will bring difficulties into your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Showing steadfastness of character may require you to recalibrate how you understand difficulties that come into your life. Some difficulties in life are unavoidable. Think of poor eyesight or hearing loss. You would not choose these conditions, but most people will experience them even if only as a part of growing older. Or consider the death of a family member. This brings unexpected and unwanted difficulties. Peter calls us to remain steadfast in the midst of these unwanted challenges.

Christians must also consider the idea of sacrifice when thinking of steadfast character. Making a sacrifice invites hardship or difficulty into your life in order to serve a greater purpose. When a person in the Old Testament made

a literal sacrifice, they were deprived of the slain animal. They suffered loss and willingly accepted the difficulties that loss entailed. Christians do not sacrifice animals, but we still make sacrifices because of our beliefs. We invite difficulties into our lives for the sake of a greater purpose. Peter called us to remain steadfast as we endure the difficulties that come with sacrifice.

To unbelievers this sounds crazy! Why would anyone invite difficulties into their lives? They do not understand sacrifice because they do not share our understanding of God, His glory, Christ, or sin. My fear is that far too many Christians have adopted the mindset of unbelievers, seeing difficulty as something to be avoided at all costs rather than willingly accepted for the glory of God. This outlook diminishes our ability to show steadfastness in character because our goal becomes avoiding difficulty rather than remaining steadfast through it for the sake of the gospel. At the outset of this lesson, it is crucial for us to consider the relationship between steadfastness and sacrifice. Give yourself the opportunity to show steadfast character! Invite difficulties into your life through sacrifices made for the sake of the gospel and remain steadfast.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Nehemiah lived during the fifth century, B.C. He was a servant of Artaxerxes, the Persian king, until being made the governor tasked with overseeing the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Jewish culture. The book of Nehemiah is a conglomeration of his memoirs and some additional material. It reveals the many struggles he faced as well as the steadfastness of his character. Nehemiah is clearly an example of steadfastness for us to emulate.

1. STEADFASTNESS STEMS FROM CONFIDENCE IN GOD.
2. STEADFASTNESS IS READY TO ACT.
3. STEADFASTNESS STANDS UP TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPOSITION.
4. STEADFASTNESS IS NOT DISTRACTED.
5. STEADFASTNESS ENDURES.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will overview the book of Nehemiah to see his steadfastness in action. It will also draw application points to encourage steadfastness in your character.*

## 1. STEADFASTNESS STEMS FROM CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

### ■ NEHEMIAH 1

**Q:** *What report did Nehemiah receive from Jerusalem?*

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah respond to the report from Jerusalem?*

The book of Nehemiah opens with Nehemiah receiving a report concerning the returned exiles in his homeland (Nehemiah 1:1–3). The report was devastating to Nehemiah. The hope of the returning exiles had disappeared. The rebuilding projects had stalled, and the people were languishing in their failure. In response to this report, Nehemiah immediately prayed. His prayer reveals why he was able to remain steadfast during the events reported later in the book. It reveals a heart completely committed to God’s Word and completely confident in God’s promises. Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and his personal sins against God (Nehemiah 1:6) and acknowledged that God was just in sending the nation into exile. But then Nehemiah reminded God of His promise to restore His people to the land if they repented. God had brought the people back into the land, but the restoration was far from complete. Nehemiah recognized that God still had more to accomplish among His people, and He called on God to act (Nehemiah 1:8–11). Every action Nehemiah took can be traced back to the promises of God mentioned in Nehemiah’s prayer. Nehemiah could remain steadfast because he was confident that God would fulfill His promises.

**Q:** *Are you rooted enough in God’s Word to trust in His promises?*

**Q:** *How does the beginning of Nehemiah limit our expectations concerning steadfastness?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Don’t miss the importance of the beginning of the book of Nehemiah. Everything you encounter in the rest of the book stems from Nehemiah’s prayer in this opening chapter. If he were driven only by personal convictions and ambition, his steadfastness could not be attributed to God, no matter how successful he was. If you desire to glorify God through your steadfastness of character, you must begin with God’s Word and the promises He has made in it. This is what distinguishes Nehemiah from the self-help gurus and those proclaiming the false gospel of prosperity. Biblical steadfastness does not “name it and claim it.” Biblical steadfastness finds God’s promises in His Word and believes in His power to bring them to fruition.

## 2. STEADFASTNESS IS READY TO ACT.

### NEHEMIAH 2

**Q:** *What drove Nehemiah to speak to King Artaxerxes on behalf of Jerusalem?*

**Q:** *Why did Nehemiah not make his intentions public when he arrived in Jerusalem?*

Although he was heartbroken over the situation in Jerusalem, Nehemiah could not rush to the king and immediately intercede on behalf of the city. The Persian kings were not known for their self-control, and their ego did not tolerate any matter to be of greater importance than themselves. If Nehemiah had rushed to him, the king would likely have rushed Nehemiah to the executioner (see Esther 4:11). Nehemiah received the report in the month of Chislev (Nehemiah 1:1), which is mid-November to mid-December. He did not make his request until Artaxerxes questioned him in the month of Nisan (Nehemiah 2:1), during the month of April. So for more than four months, Nehemiah patiently waited to make his concerns known to the king. When Artaxerxes asked, Nehemiah was ready. He skillfully presented the conditions in Jerusalem as a personal concern (Nehemiah 2:3) and appealed to the king's altruism to obtain the verdict he desired. Nehemiah's interaction with the king reveals his steadfast character. He did not rush to make his demands known or give up hope that anything could be done for his city. He patiently waited and was ready to act when the opportunity presented itself.

**Q:** *How can steadfastness strengthen your faith?*

**Q:** *Why is patience difficult?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Nehemiah showed a remarkable balance between patience and readiness to act. Each of these elements describes one side of what it means to be steadfast. If you are ready to act but not patient, you risk having your efforts blow up in your face. If you are patient but not ready to act, you risk having the opportunity pass you by. Being steadfast means being ready but not rushing ahead before it is time.

### 3. STEADFASTNESS STANDS UP TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPOSITION.

■ NEHEMIAH 2:9–10; 4:1–23; 5:1–19

Q: *Why did Sanballat and Tobiah oppose Nehemiah?*

Q: *In what ways did Sanballat and Tobiah oppose Nehemiah?*

We know from extra-biblical sources that Sanballat was a governor of Samaria, and Tobiah was from a powerful family in nearby Ammon. Both leaders were content with the status quo that existed before Nehemiah arrived to rebuild Jerusalem. They likely saw Nehemiah as a competitor for local rule. Their opposition began with ridiculing Nehemiah's efforts. Sanballat jeered at the Jews and openly questioned whether they could complete the task they had started (Nehemiah 4:1–2). Tobiah mocked the rebuilt wall. A city's walls were supposed to be its primary defense in case of an attack. Breaching a city's wall should require enormous effort by an opposing army and cost many lives. But Tobiah suggested a mere fox could push over the wall being reconstructed around Jerusalem.

When Sanballat and Tobiah failed to discourage Nehemiah and his workers, they threatened him with military violence (Nehemiah 4:7–8, 11). This time, their efforts succeeded in discouraging Nehemiah's men (Nehemiah 4:10), but Nehemiah rallied them (Nehemiah 4:15–23). Each day, they dressed for battle but went to work building the wall. They continued the construction even as they stood ready to drop what they were doing to defend the city. The opposition may have made things harder or slowed them down, but it did not defeat their purpose. Nehemiah and his workers remained steadfast even under threat of battle.

Q: *Should Christians ever be surprised when their faith raises opposition? Why or why not?*

Q: *Why should you be encouraged when you meet external opposition confronting your faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus warned His followers that the world would hate

them (John 15:18–25). He reasoned that since the world hated Him, it would also hate His followers. In fact, the disciples should be alarmed if the world didn't hate them. If they got along great with the world, it was a sure sign they were of the world (John 15:19). Therefore, we should not be surprised when we face opposition to our faith. Neither should we despair. First John 4:4 says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Those who oppose us oppose God, and they are no match for Him. We do not have to earn the victory because God already has it in hand. Our calling is to remain steadfast even while enduring tremendous opposition, just like Nehemiah and his men did.

**Q:** *What was the cause of poverty among the returned exiles?*

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah respond to the needs of the poor?*

Nehemiah's opposition was internal as well as external. The first group of returning exiles had arrived sixty to eighty years before Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judea. In this time, the rich within the community began exploiting the poor. The poor had to borrow the money to pay their taxes. The rich let them borrow the money but made them pay it back with interest. If a debtor could not repay his debt, the rich would seize his children as slave labor. While the walls were being reconstructed, the poor made their struggles known to Nehemiah. Nehemiah was angry when he heard the report (Nehemiah 5:6). Not only were the wealthy not acting in love toward the poor, but their sin also endangered the rebuilding of the wall. How could the poor be expected to work on a wall when they could not keep food on their tables (5:2)? Nehemiah again showed steadfastness under pressure. He did not lead an uprising against the elite. Instead, he confronted them by exposing their sin (Nehemiah 5:9) and called them to cease their heartless practices (Nehemiah 5:10–11). His confrontational yet gentle approach won the approval of the Jewish elites. They agreed to stop exploiting the poor for their own gain (Nehemiah 5:12–13). Although Nehemiah was not part of the problem, he led by example, sacrificing his own food allowance as governor (Nehemiah 5:14–19).

**Q:** *Why is internal opposition (opposition from brothers and sisters in Christ) often more challenging than external opposition?*

**Q:** *What are some temptations we must avoid when confronting internal opposition?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When we face opposition, our natural reaction is to overcome it by any means necessary. But this creates problems when the opposition comes from fellow believers. We cannot be concerned merely with vindicating ourselves. We must seek restoration in the body of Christ. If we take a no-prisoners approach, we may achieve vindication, but we get it at the cost of the restoration the offender needs. To meet internal opposition with steadfastness, you must defend yourself and the unity of the body of Christ.

A few weeks ago, I noticed a troubling issue within the children’s ministry in our church. I decided to bring it up during a deacons meeting, but I did not discuss the matter with our children’s minister ahead of time. After the meeting, I recognized I had erred in not at least informing our children’s minister. He was taken off guard during the meeting and felt a little embarrassed. When I later apologized to him, he admitted being resentful of my actions but resolved that I just had the best interest of his ministry at heart. I believe our children’s minister showed steadfast character in this matter. He faced internal opposition from a brother in Christ. Rather than allowing it to create dissention between us, he acted with humility and sought reconciliation at a later time. That is the way to handle internal opposition as a Christian.

#### 4. STEADFASTNESS IS NOT DISTRACTED.

##### ■ NEHEMIAH 6:1-14

**Q:** *Why did Sanballat request a meeting with Nehemiah?*

**Q:** *How did Sanballat attempt to deter him after Nehemiah refused his meeting?*

As the wall neared completion, Sanballat appeared again. He still intended to oppose Nehemiah, but rather than relying on an army, this time he relied on cunning. He requested a meeting with Nehemiah as a pretense for a chance to do him harm (Nehemiah 6:2–3), but Nehemiah saw through the scheme. His response reveals his steadfastness (Nehemiah 6:3). He was completely devoted to the task God had called him to. Even had the meeting been legitimate, Nehemiah would not deviate from building the walls.

When he discovered he could not deceive Nehemiah, Sanballat threatened to blackmail him by spreading rumors that the Jews intended to revolt and anoint Nehemiah as king once their walls were completed. Rumors of this nature could bring swift retribution from their Persian overlords, regardless of their validity. Nehemiah again saw through Sanballat’s threats and remained steadfast. He refused to allow threats to distract the people from God’s purpose.



Sanballat and Tobiah were as resilient as Nehemiah was steadfast. Their final plot was to hire Judah's own prophets to deceive him (Nehemiah 6:10–14). The prophets warned Nehemiah that a threat had been made on his life and begged him to take sanctuary in the temple. But he saw through their treachery and refused their warning. He remained steadfast, no matter what situation arose.

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah avoid the distractions Sanballat created?*

**Q:** *How can you avoid distraction in pursuing God's purposes for your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – A failure to remain steadfast does not always entail abandoning God's purposes and denying His calling on our life. Sometimes we fail to remain steadfast because we get distracted from what God has called us to do. We get wrapped up in a sporting event or TV show and neglect our obligation to read the Bible with our children. We get consumed with our phones at night and neglect to pray with our spouse before bed. We have not abandoned our family responsibilities, but we have allowed ourselves to be distracted from them. We have failed to prioritize God's purposes, and in doing so we have not remained steadfast. The key to fighting distractions is learning to recognize them, prioritizing what God wants, and leaving distractions behind, as Nehemiah did.

## 5. STEADFASTNESS ENDURES.

### ■ NEHEMIAH 13

**Q:** *Why didn't Nehemiah stop Eliashib from preparing a space for Tobiah in the temple?*

**Q:** *Why didn't Nehemiah ensure that the Levites received the support they needed?*

Nehemiah completed the walls and successfully governed Judea for several years, but then he was called back to Persia to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 13:6). When he was able to secure his leave from the king, he returned to find Judea in a complete mess. One of the priests, Eliashib, had granted Tobiah—the same Tobiah who had opposed him during the rebuilding of the wall—a space in the temple to store his personal furniture (Nehemiah 13:4–9). The temple supplies had been removed to make room for it. Nehemiah also discovered that the priests had

been neglected and therefore forced to abandon their duties at the temple to return to their own fields (Nehemiah 13:10–14). Nehemiah also observed the people violating the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15–22). What was supposed to be a day of rest had become like any other day of the week. Finally, Nehemiah saw that the people were marrying non-believing foreigners (Nehemiah 13:23–27). Just as foreign women had led King Solomon astray so many years before so now the people were being led away from God by foreign marriages. One wonders if Nehemiah felt like quitting and returning to Persia. He had sacrificed so much, and the people had turned their backs on him and their God. But he did not quit. Nehemiah remained steadfast and addressed each issue in turn.

Q: *Why is it easy to become a victim of your own success?*

Q: *Why is it impossible for Christians to trust in their previous good deeds as evidence of their present faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –People often become victims of their own success. People in the business world fight their way into a premier position in the company. When they get to the top, they finally feel at ease and rest on their previous accomplishments, but in doing so, they fail at the very job they had been striving for all that time. Athletes train year after year to win the championship and sign a lucrative contract. Soon afterwards, they become a shell of the superstar they once were. If we are to remain steadfast in our faith, we cannot rest in what we have accomplished in the past. Nehemiah never did this. When he returned to Jerusalem and discovered the mess waiting for him, he resolved to address each situation. He remained steadfast. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to God, no matter how long we have been following Him or how far we have come from our lives before Christ. Our current faithfulness says more than our past deeds ever will.

## NEXT STEPS

Make a list of the main things God has called you to. Describe what it would look like to remain steadfast in each of these areas. If you have failed to remain steadfast in anything God has called you to, commit to starting again in God's grace and continuing in steadfast resolve.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, my steadfastness depends on you and your promises. Help me to trust in you.*

*-Lord Jesus, you remained steadfast even in the most trying circumstances. And you did it so that I might have everlasting life. Help me to look to you as the ultimate model of steadfastness.*

*-Father, make me aware of what distracts me from what you have called me to. Help me to put distractions aside so I may pursue your purposes with steadfastness.*

*-God, help me to deal with opposition, whether external or internal, and remain steadfast to the calling you have placed on my life.*

