

***The Roots of Endurance*** by John Piper, Crossway, Carol Stream, IL, 2002 (32 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

### **1. The Grace of God Is Sufficient**

The twenty-first century will not be an easy time to be a Christian. It is not meant to be easy. But we are not left without help. The Bible centers on a crucified, risen, and reigning Christ and is full of promises for every crisis. And the history of God's church is full of empowering examples of those who proved that the grace of God is sufficient to enable us to endure to the end and be saved. (p. 38)

### **2. Being Gracious Is Not Being Gullible**

Newton was not driven away by people's imperfections, and he was not overly impressed by their gifts. He was patient and perceptive. He saw beneath the surface that repelled and the surface that attracted. He once wrote to a friend, "Beware, my friend, of mistaking the ready exercise of gifts for the exercise of grace" Being gracious to people did not mean being gullible. (p. 60)

### **3. Look Continually to the Lord**

In a letter to a friend he warned that if we do not look continually to the Lord, controversy will obstruct communion with God. "Though you set out in defense of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you, it may become your own cause and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind and will surely obstruct communion with God" (*The Works of Rev. John Newton*, Vol. 1, pp. 273-274). (p. 61)

### **4. Speaking the Truth in Love**

"The Scripture, which...teaches us *what* we are to say, is equally explicit as to the *temper* and Spirit in which we are to speak. Though I had knowledge of all mysteries, and the tongue of an angel to declare them, I could hope for a little acceptance or usefulness, unless I was to speak 'in love.'" (p. 62)

### **5. Shunning Controversy**

For the sake of repentance and knowledge of truth, Newton's pattern of tenderness in doctrinal matters was to shun controversy. (p. 63)

### **6. Influence Others with Truth for Their Good**

Newton cared more about influencing people with truth for their good than winning debates. William Jay recounts how Newton described the place of his Calvinism. He was having tea one day with Newton. Newton said, "I am more of a Calvinist than anything else; but I use my Calvinism in my writings and my preachings as I use this sugar"—taking a lump, and putting it into his tea-cup, and stirring it, adding, "I do not give it alone, and whole; but mixed and diluted." In other words, his Calvinism permeated all that he wrote and taught and served to sweeten everything. Few people

like to eat sugar cubes, but they like the effect of sugar when it permeates in right proportions. (p.64)

### **7. Holding Onto Truth for the Transformation of Others**

Most pastors and laypeople cannot devote much of their time to blowing the trumpet for rigorous intellectual theology. They should see its usefulness and necessity and encourage its proper place. But they cannot be faulted that they mainly have flocks to love and hearts to change. Defending the truth is a crucial part of that, but it is not the main part. *Holding* the truth and *permeating* all our ministry with the greatness and sweetness of truth for the transformation of our people's lives is the main part of our ministry. (p. 67)

### **8. Communicate the Stuff of the World in Which Others Live**

Unhealthy minds can only deal in abstractions and cannot get outside themselves to be moved by concrete, external wonders. We will never be tender toward our people if we merely communicate the heaviness of general concepts and theories rather than the specific stuff of the world in which they live. (p. 69)

### **9. Life Is Hard and God Is Good**

His tender patience and persistence in caring for difficult people came, in part, from a very sober and realistic view of what to expect from this world. Life is hard, and God is good. (p.70)

### **10. All Things Will Be New**

There are no perfect pastors or laypeople. This must not discourage us but only make us patient as we wait for the day when all things will be new." (p. 70)

### **11. Honored to Preach the Gospel**

Till the day he died, he never ceased to be amazed that, as he said at age seventy-two, "such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned, but reserved to the honor of preaching thy Gospel, which he had blasphemed and renounced...this is wonderful indeed! The more thou hast exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself." He wrote his own epitaph:

*John Newton,  
Clerk,  
Once and Infidel and Libertine,  
A Servant of Slaves in Africa, Asia, and Latin America Was,  
by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior  
JESUS CHRIST,  
Preserved, restored, pardoned,  
And appointed to preach the Faith  
He had long laboured to destroy.*

*He ministered  
Near 16 years as curate and vicar  
of Olney in Bucks,  
And 28  
as rector of these united parishes.  
(p. 71-72)*

## **12. Messages from God**

“When I hear a knock at my study door, I hear a message from God. It may be a lesson of instruction; perhaps a lesson of patience: but, since it is *his* message, it must be interesting.” (p. 74)

## **13. No Temptation Is Dangerous for the Soul**

He knew that even his temptations were ordered by the sovereign goodness of God and that not to have any was dangerous for the soul. He approved of Samuel Rutherford’s comment that “there is no temptation like being without temptation.” (p. 74)

## **14. By Faith the Believer Triumphs**

“By faith [the believer] triumphs over [the world’s] smiles and enticements: he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures.” (p. 75)

## **15. A Little Suffering**

“My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ’s sake.” —Charles Simeon (p. 76)

## **16. Contemplation of the Cross**

“A nominal Christian is content with proving the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer. But the true Christian loves it, delights in it, glories in it, and shudders at the very thought of glorying in anything else...Let all your joys flow from the contemplation of his cross.” — Charles Simeon (p. 76)

## **17. In Trials Grew Down in Humility and Upward in Adoration of Christ**

Simeon’s life and ministry help us see persecution, opposition, slander, misunderstanding, disappointment, self-recrimination, weakness, and danger as the normal portion of faithful Christian living and ministry. I want us to see a beleaguered triumph in the life of a man who was a sinner like us and who, year after year, in his trials, “grew downward” in humility and upward in his adoration of Christ and who did not yield to bitterness or to the temptation to leave his charge—for fifty-four years. (p. 78)

### **18. Failing to Thrive with Criticism and Opposition**

One of the pervasive marks of our times is emotional fragility. It hangs in the air we breath. We are easily hurt. We pout and mope easily. We blame easily. We break easily. Our marriages break easily. Our faith breaks easily. Our happiness breaks easily. And our commitment to the church breaks easily. We are easily disheartened, and it seems we have little capacity for surviving and thriving in the face of criticism and opposition. (p. 79)

### **19. Count It Joy When One Meets Trials**

A typical emotional response to trouble in the church is to think, *If that's the way they feel about me, then I'll just find another church.* We see very few healthy, happy examples today whose lives spell out in flesh and blood the rugged words, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (James 1:2). When historians list the character traits of America in the last third of the twentieth century, commitment, constancy, tenacity, endurance, patience, resolve, and perseverance will not be on the list. The list will begin with an all-consuming interest in self-esteem. It will be followed by the subheadings of self-assertiveness, self-enhancement, and self-realization. And if we think that we are not children of our times, let us simply test ourselves to see how we respond when people reject our ideas or spurn our good efforts or misconstrue our best interests. (p. 79)

### **20. Be Imitators of Those with Faith and Patience**

The spirit of the age is too much in us. We need to spend time with the kind of people—whether dead or alive—whose lives prove there is another way to live. Scripture says, be "imitators of those who through faith and *patience* inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). (p. 80)

### **21. Simeon and Stott Compared**

Simeon never married. I have read only one sentence about this fact. H. C. G. Moule said he "had deliberately and resolutely chosen the then necessary celibacy of a Fellowship that he might then better work for God at Cambridge." This too requires a special kind of endurance. Not many have it, and it is a beautiful thing when one finds it. Who knows how many men and women Simeon inspired with the possibility of celibacy and chastity because of his lifelong commitment to Christ and his church as an unmarried man. One such person in our day who counts Simeon as a hero in this and other regards is John Stott, a kind latter-day Simeon in more ways than most realize. Not only did neither marry, but both were evangelical and Anglican, Cambridge graduates, long-time pastors in one church, celibate, committed to social concern, and engaged in world evangelization. (p. 85)

### **22. Christ Was Everything for Charles Simeon**

But he was sure that Christ is the burden of the words of the Prophets and the Apostles; and he knew that He was everything for Charles Simeon...For him Christ was the center

of all subjects for sinful man; and all his hearers were for him sinful men, for whom the gospel was the one remedy. Christ was the Gospel; and personal faith in Him, a living Person, was the Gospel secret...Simeon himself thus describes the three great aims of all his preaching: *“To humble the sinner, To exalt the Saviour, To promote holiness.”* (p. 89)

### **23. Retirement Is Not a Biblical Principle**

In 1807, after twenty-five years of ministry, his health failed suddenly. His voice gave way so that preaching was very difficult and at times “more like one dead than alive.” This broken condition lasted for thirteen years, till he was sixty years old. In all this time Simeon pressed on in his work.

The way this weakness came to an end is remarkable and shows the amazing hand of God on Simeon’s life. “It passed away quite suddenly and without any evident physical cause.” He tells the story that in 1819 he was on his last visit to Scotland. As he crossed the border he says he was “almost as perceptibly revived in strength as the woman was after she had touched the hem of our Lord’s garment.” His interpretation of God’s providence in this begins back before the weakness had befallen him in 1807. Up till then he had promised himself a very active life up to age sixty, and then a Sabbath evening. Now he seemed to hear his Master saying:

I laid you aside, because you entertained with satisfaction the thought of resting from your labor; but now you have arrived at the very period when you had promised yourself that satisfaction, and have determined instead to spend your strength for me to the latest hour of your life, I have doubled, trebled, quadrupled your strength, that you may execute your desire on a more extended plan.

So at sixty years of age, Simeon renewed his commitment to his pulpit and the local and global mission of the church and preached vigorously for seventeen more years, until two months before his death. Surely there is a lesson for us here concerning retirement. Is there any biblical warrant for the modern, western assumption that old age or retirement years are to be years of coasting or easing up or playing? I am not aware of such a principle in the Bible. In fact, it is a great sadness to see so many older Christians adapting this cultural norm and wasting the last decades of their lives in innocent lounging around. Who knows but that greater strength and health would be given if there were resolves to move toward need and not comfort in our old age? Who knows whether God would give awakening and renewal if we would renew our dreams of ministry to the perishing world and not just the “ministry” of playing with our grandchildren? (p. 95-96)

## **24. The People of His Church Were His Responsibility**

It did not matter that his people were often against him. He was not commissioned by them, but by the Lord. And they were his responsibility. He believed Hebrews 13:17—that he would one day have to give and account for the souls of his church. (p. 98)

## **25. Trusted Counsel Necessary**

Simeon was deeply wronged in 1821. We are not given the details. But when he was asked about his response (which had evidently been non-retaliatory) he said, “My rule is—never to hear, or see, or know, what if heard, or seen, or known, would call for animadversion from me. Hence it is that I dwell in peace in the midst of lions.” In other words, we would all do well not to be curious about what others are saying about us.

There is little good that can come of it: pride, if the comments are good; discouragement, if they are critical; anger, if they are false. These are not the emotions we need to cultivate. Trusted counsel from reliable people, not rumors, is the stuff of good self-assessment. (p.100)

## **26. Loving Truth More than Controversy**

Controversy and doctrinal accountability are tasks we must engage in until the Lord returns. It is not a happy business, but it is a necessary one. And in so doing, we must heed Simeon’s words to examine our motives lest we love controversy more than the truth itself. (p. 101)

## **27. The Need of Face-to-face Conversation**

It is remarkable, as Simeon said, how much evil can be averted by doing things face to face. We attempt far too much fence mending today by letter or e-mail or phone. There is something mysteriously powerful about the peacemaking potentials of personal, face-to-face conversation. It did not spare Simeon years of criticism, but it was surely one of the means God used to overcome the opposition in the long run. (p. 101)

## **28. Moved to Service from God’s Actions**

Receiving and benefiting from criticism is utterly essential to survive and thrive in Christian life and ministry. We need to absorb and profit from reproof—from the Lord and from man. Recall how Simeon interpreted his thirteen-year weakness from age forty-seven to sixty as a rebuke from the Lord for his intention to retire at sixty. He took it well and gave himself with all his might to the ministry of the Word until he died. At seventy-six he wrote, “Through mercy I am, for ministerial service, stronger than I have been at any time in thirty years...preaching at seventy-six with all the exuberance of youth...but looking for my dismissal [death] daily. “He was not embittered by a thirteen-year rebuke. He was impelled by it. (p. 102)

### **29. Being Faithful Shows Fruit**

One illustration of the truth of Simeon's confidence is the story of one of his preaching trips to Scotland. He happened to visit the home of a minister named Stewart who was not truly converted and was quite miserable. Through the personal life and witness of Simeon, Mr. Stewart was transformed and for fifteen years afterward was powerful for the gospel.

One of the couples who said later that they "owed the own selves" to the new preaching of Mr. Stewart were the parents of Alexander Duff. They brought up their son in the full faith of the Gospel and with a special sense of dedication to the service of Christ. Duff, in turn, became one of the great Scottish missionaries to India for over fifty years. So it is true that you never know when the Lord may give a double blessing on your ministry to a small number and multiply it thirty-, sixty-, or a hundredfold even after you are dead and gone. This confidence kept Simeon going more than once. (p. 104-105)

### **30. Participating in Christ's Sufferings**

I was an object of much contempt and derision in the University. I strolled forth one day, buffeted and afflicted with my little Testament in hand, I prayed earnestly to my God that He would comfort me with some cordial from His Word, and that, on opening the book, I might find some text which should sustain me. It was not for direction I was looking, for I am no friend to such superstitions...but only for support. The first text which caught my eye was this: "*They found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to bear the cross.*" You know Simon is the same name as Simeon. What a word of instruction was there—what a blessed hint of my encouragement! To have the cross laid upon me, that I might bear it after Jesus—what a privilege! It was enough. Now I could leap and sing for joy as one whom Jesus was honoring with a participation of His sufferings. (p. 105)

### **31. Not Minding Suffering for Christ's Sake**

We recall his words when he was seventy-one and Joseph Gurney asked him how he had surmounted his persecution for forty-nine years. He said, "My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake." (p. 105-106)

### **32. Adoring Communion with God**

Handley Moule captures the essence of Simeon's secret of longevity in this sentence: "Before honor is humility,' and he had been '*growing downwards*' year by year under the stern discipline of difficulty met in the right way, the way of *close and adoring communion with God.*" Those two things were the heartbeat of Simeon's inner life: growing downward in humility and growing upward in adoring communion with God. (p. 107)