



Six Habits to Help You Hold On in Tough Times

Adapted from Rick Warren

Introduction

I've served in ministry for more than half a century, and I've walked with the Lord for over 60 years. I've lived through seasons of great joy and great struggle.

I have no doubt that you, too, will experience tough times as you remain faithful in ministry. Unfortunately, you can count on it.

Ministry isn't a 50-yard sprint; it is a marathon. I want you to finish the race God has placed before you. Your faithfulness matters—to your family, to your church, and to God.

Paul wrote this reminder in Colossians 2:6: "*You have accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord. Now keep on following him*" (**Contemporary English Version**).

I want to empower you—no matter what ministry you're in—to keep on. Anyone can thrive in ministry for six months or even five years. But I'm praying you'll stay faithful for a lifetime!

Over the years, six habits have helped me to keep going even when life was difficult. When you're physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually down, these habits will give you the strength you need to thrive. They aren't things I pulled from some book; I pulled them from my own life and ministry.

LESSON ONE: KEEP MY LIFE CLEAN

I've read hundreds of Christian biographies about men and women God has used over the centuries. And I've noticed something: ***Refinement precedes a new assignment.*** Before God begins to use someone in a new and greater way, God cleans their life.

1. List some things you have done to refine/clean-up your life.

2. Which items you listed were hard for you to do? Why were they hard for you?

3. Give your thoughts on this passage of Scripture: 1Cor. 9:27 (NKJV) “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”

4. Paul showed us this when he wrote to Timothy, “*All who make themselves clean from evil will be used for special purposes. They will be made holy, useful to the Master, ready to do any good work*” (2 Timothy 2:21 New Century Version).

God isn't looking for talented people to use for His work; He's looking for people who desire to live clean lives, free from sin.

- a) Give examples of talented Christians who did not/do not live clean lives:

- b) What did you think/feel when you became aware of their uncleanness?

Read 1Cor. 9:27 (NKJV) “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”

- c) Often, those who DO live clean lives are persecuted. Why do you think that happens?

Read 2 Cor. 12:7 KJV “*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*”

- d) What are some BENEFITS of living a clean life?





Lesson Two: KEEP MY EYES OPEN

It's easy to get tunnel vision and become self-focused when you're experiencing a tough time. It's natural in those times to think about your own problems. But Psalm 105:4 says, "*Keep your eyes open for God, watch for His works; be alert for signs of His presence*" (**The Message Bible**).

1. Name some ways to keep your eyes open for God:
 2. How can we become alert for signs of God's presence?
 3. How can we know that God is with us?
 4. The most misunderstood word in ministry is *vision*. I hear people regularly say how important it is to be a visionary. Vision isn't about seeing the future. The last two years during the pandemic have taught us that no one can predict the future.

- 5. Read Proverbs 29:18 KJV** “*Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*”

a) When you see the word ‘perish’, what comes to your mind?

Now read Proverbs 29:18 NIV “*Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.*”

b) List some examples of unrestrained behavior:

- 6. Vision is seeing God at work in your present situation and staying in step with Him!**

a) Where is God at work in YOUR present situation?

b) What things are you doing that show you are ‘staying in step’ with God?





Lesson Three: KEEP MY HEART GRATEFUL

1. Synonyms for the word Gratitude:

- *thankfulness*
- *appreciation*
- *pleasing*
- *contentment*

2. Read 1Tim. 6:6 NIV: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

What is this ‘great gain’ Paul is talking about?

3. Doctors say the **healthiest** emotion is gratitude. God uses grateful people. God does not use or bless ungrateful people.

The Bible encourages us to, “*Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ*” (**1 Peter 3:15 The Message Bible**).

Look at these verses on gratefulness. Jot down why it is healthy to be grateful:

- a) **Psalm 107:21-22-** *Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind.*

Why this is healthy: _____

- b) **Psalm 118:1-** *Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.*

Why this is healthy: _____

- c) **Daniel 2:23-** *I thank and praise You, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, You have made known to me what we asked of You, You have made known to us the dream of the king.*

Why this is healthy: _____

- d) ***Psalm 7:17- I will give thanks to the Lord because of His righteousness; I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High.***

Why this is healthy: _____

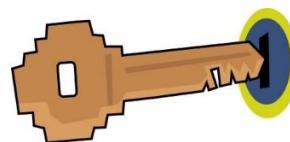
- e) ***Philippians 4:6-7- Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Why this is healthy: _____

4. What are some signs of burnout in ministry?

5. What I've learned is people burn out in ministry because they've let grumbling replace gratitude. You'll find plenty of issues to grumble about in ministry.

- We live in a broken world.
- You work with broken people, so you can't expect everything to always go right.
- Ministry is messy.



That's why gratefulness is the key to longevity in ministry.



Lesson Four: KEEP MY PURPOSE FIRM

Definition for Purpose: something set up as an object or end to be attained; intention; resolution; determination

1. **Read and discuss Romans 8:28:** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*

2. **To prepare for difficult days, memorize this verse:** “*You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you*” (**Isaiah 26:3 Good News Translation**).

3. **The Great Commandment:** **Matt. 22:37-38 NIV-** *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.*

4. **The Great Commission:** **Matt. 28:19-20 NIV-** *¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

5. **Whenever you’re confused or in doubt about anything in your life, always return to the five purposes found in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission:**
 - a) to know and love God
 - b) to belong to His family
 - c) to grow in Christ
 - d) to serve Christ
 - e) to share Christ

That's the elemental chart of the Christian life. When you're in doubt and confused, always return to God's purposes.

6. Why do you think knowing your purpose in life will help you hold on during tough times?
 7. Do you know what your Spiritual Gifts are? If so, list them:
 8. Are you fully operating in your Spiritual Gifts? If not, why not?



Lesson Five: KEEP MY FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

1. When times are tough, you can't fully depend upon the news or your social media feed. Why not?

2. Instead, you must hold on to God's Word no matter what. Why?

3. Hebrews 6:18 tells us: "*These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when He makes a promise, and He cannot lie when He makes an oath. These things encourage us who came to God for safety. They give us strength to hold on to the hope we have been given*" (New Century Version).

4. Read Psalm 119:105 NKJV: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.*"

What does that mean to you?

5. What keeps Christians from participating in group bible study?



Lesson Six: KEEP MY MIND ON JESUS

A young boy was being really rambunctious. His mother repeatedly told him to calm down, but the boy refused to. Being frustrated with her son's rebellion, the mother told him to sit down. He sat down, but he said out loud, "I might be sitting on the **OUTSIDE**, but I'm standing up on the **INSIDE**."

This young boy's mind was made up!

1. It's hard to sway someone when they have their mind made up—when it is SET on something. **Why do you think that is true?**
 2. Psychologists talk about two kinds of motivation—internal and external.
 - a) We are motivated **externally** when we do something because of the promised reward or the fear of punishment. List some examples:
 - b) We are motivated **internally** when we do something because it makes us feel fulfilled, expresses our gifts, makes people like us, or gives us some other kind of positive feeling. List some examples:

- c) **But there's a higher motivation.** The impact our ministries are having on eternity is a **far stronger motivation** than either external or internal.

That's why **Hebrews 12:1-2** tells us to “run with endurance the race God has set before us . . . by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith” (*New Living Translation*).

3. **Read Philippians 2:3-5 (NKJV)-** *³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*

Read Isa. 26: 3 (NKJV)- *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

Now discuss the following question:

How can keeping our minds on Jesus hold us in tough times?

Jesus could put up with anything because He always kept His eyes on eternity. That's why He could endure the cross. Keeping your mind on eternity will also help you endure the trials of ministry.

Fellow Christian, you may feel like quitting right now. Don't do it. **Tough times never last.**