

2 Timothy 4:7 (NKJV)

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, (*my course*) *KJV*, I have kept the faith.

Whether you are just starting to realize the will of God for your life or have been living on the path He has for you; this series will help you **Stay the Course**

Often, even if a person fully understands the will of God for their lives, it takes time mentally to adjust to what is revealed

The apostle Paul was one of the most unlikely candidates you could ever imagine being called into the ministry

- If God could use him, He can use you, and I

Ephesians 1:4, 11 (NKJV)

⁴ just as **He** chose us **in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

¹¹ **In Him** also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the **purpose of Him** who works all things according to the counsel of **His will**

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God will always confirm what He tells you to do and give you further direction for the course of your life when you surrender to His call

Don't Let the Enemy Scare You Out of God's Will

Stay Put Where God Has Placed You

“For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.” (Psalm 27:5–6, NKJV)

- God promises to never leave or abandon you
– **Hebrews 13:5**

Learn to See Every Crisis as a New Opportunity

Two of Paul's companions in Corinth were Aquila and Priscilla

- In **Acts 18** it says that they were forced to leave their home in Italy
- They were Jewish yet Christian

They were ejected by imperial Roman decree because of riots in Rome between Jews and Christians over Jesus

- Circumstances were against them
- The culture was against them
- The opinion of their Jewish peers was against them
- They had no money, no home, they needed a place to live
- Yet they helped start one of the greatest churches in the New Testament

In life all of us have opportunities to get upset or offended at things that happen

- Part of victorious living is learning how to move past those moments
- Refusing to not allow offense to sink down into our souls and affect us negatively

Imagine the grief that Aquila and Priscilla must have faced in their situation

- If they would have allowed offense to creep in they may never have met the Apostle Paul
- They may have missed their opportunity to make a mark on Corinth for the Kingdom of God
- They had to maintain their peace and remain clear in their hearts to the direction that Holy Spirit was leading them

Maintaining a right attitude is vital in the pursuit and ultimate fulfillment of God's call on your life

- Think about how important your physical heart is
- Even though we can't see it, we can't live without it
- The heart has a direct impact on every single part of the human body, pumping blood through our arteries

Our natural heart is a powerful reflection of our spiritual heart

The natural heart pumps blood into every part of the body influencing a person's ability to live and function

What is produced and entertained in a person's inner most spiritual being that determines the ultimate outcome of his life

“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.””

(Matthew 15:18–20, NKJV)

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” (Proverbs 4:23, NLT)

- Jesus said, *“...it is impossible that no offenses should come...”* – Luke 17:1, NKJV

While you are alive on this planet you can be assured that you will have an opportunity to become offended at some point

- You also have a choice to not give in to temptation
- Aquila and Priscilla had every opportunity to become offended
- They chose not to give into the temptation

“*Be angry, and do not sin*”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26–27, NKJV)

Offense is a major trapping of the Devil

In **Luke 17:1** the word “*offense*” is the Greek word “*skandalon*”

- Used to describe a small piece of wood that would be used to keep the door of an animal trap propped open
- Once the animal entered the trap it would accidentally bump the “*skandalon*”
- The trap door would slam shut, leaving no way of escape
- Offense slams the door on freedom
- Trapping you in the narrow confines of your negative thoughts and attitudes
- Unable to move forward in accomplishing God’s will for your life

An offense usually occurs when you see or hear behavior that’s so different from what you expected that it causes you to falter or wobble in your soul

- Completely stunned by a failed expectation
- Causing you to emotionally lose your footing
- The more you think about it the shock turns into disappointment
- Disappointment turns into offense

When a person becomes offended and doesn't deal with those feelings correctly the negative attitude and thoughts churn and fester turning unto a root of bitterness

“looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;” (Hebrews 12:15, NKJV)

- Root – as in a tree
- Something that is established, deeply embedded, or firmly fixed
- Springing up – a little plant that is just starting to sprout and grow
- A small seedling just breaking through the soil

Bitterness doesn't overwhelm us all at once

- Instead, it's a toxic weed that grows gradually beneath the surface

Finally becoming a huge, ugly growth that defiles not only that person's life, but also the lives of many others with whom they come in contact

If the root isn't quickly uprooted and removed, the bitterness will eventually become a full-blown, poisonous vine producing bitter, wounding, hurtful, scornful fruit in the life of *everyone* who eats it!

Proverbs 18:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ A brother offended *is harder to win* than a strong city, and contentions *are* like the bars of a castle.

- These cities of old had walls around them that kept unwelcomed inhabitants and invaders out
- The walls were the city's assurance of protection
- Those who owed taxes were not allowed in until they paid the taxes owed

We build walls around our hearts for the same reason

- We want to prevent any further wounds
- We become selective, denying entry to all who we fear will hurt us
- We filter out anyone we think owes us something
- We withhold access until they pay the price of entry
- We open our lives only to those we believe are on our side
- Yet the people who are "*on our side*" are offended as well

Instead of helping, we stack additional stones on our existing walls, making them thicker and stronger

- Eventually the walls that were meant to protect become a prison
- Not only are we cautious about who comes in but are fearful to venture outside of our fortress
- We isolate ourselves because of fear

Proverbs 18:1 (NKJV)

A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.

- The focus of offended Christians is inward and introspective
- We will only allow people close to us who won't hurt us

If we never risk being hurt, we cannot live in unconditional love

- Unconditional love gives others the right to hurt us

The Love of God doesn't seek its own, but hurt people become more and more self-seeking and self-contained

- An offended Christian is someone who takes life but cannot release life
- As a result, even the life that does come in becomes stagnant within the walls or prison of offense
- These walls become strongholds
- Strongholds are set patterns of reasoning through which all information is processed
- Originally built to protect now become a source of torment because they war against the knowledge of God

When we filter everything through past hurts, rejections, and experiences, we find it impossible to believe or trust God

- We doubt the goodness of God
- We don't believe He means what He says

We all have reasons to become bitter because of what we experience in life

- We must stay free of bitterness if we want God to use us
- We are called to walk in His love toward other people
- I believe that Aquila and Priscilla obviously didn't let bitterness settle in
- Instead, they believed that God would work out things for their good – **Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:20**
- Their personal crisis turned into an opportunity for ministry they had would have never experienced
- They became part of the team that founded the church in Corinth and later used in the powerful church of Ephesus

After Claudius died, and his edict of expulsion was lifted they returned to Rome where they helped lay the foundation for the church of Rome – **Romans 16:3,4**

An early writing also indicates that Aquila was later ordained as a leader of a church in the province of Asia

Because Aquila and Priscilla responded correctly to crisis and maintained a right heart attitude, void of offense, God was able to use them mightily for many years to come

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” (**Proverbs 13:12, NKJV**)

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:”

(Hebrews 10:35–36, NKJV)

The book of Hebrews is written to a group of Jewish believers who had suffered tremendous loss of personal possessions as a result of persecution

- For years they had believed and waited for God to bring restoration to their lives
- They had become disheartened
- In fact, they were close to giving up
- These verses tell us they were suffering and the answer to their prayer hadn't manifested YET
- They were languishing in the “in-between-time” between prayer and the answer
- This is always one of the most difficult times to maintain a right heart attitude

God knew the people were close to giving up, so He exhorted them

- “*Cast*” – to throw away

Not a casual toss but to forcefully throw an object so far away that it would never be seen or dealt with again

Blind Bartimaeus

“And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.”
(Mark 10:50, NKJV)

- Same word
- A garment was wrapped around his legs, which restricted his movement

Because the garment kept him from going where he wanted to go, the bible says he “*cast away*” his garment and came to Jesus

- Finally, free of what hindered him, Bartimaeus could get up and do what he wanted to do

The Hebrew believers in our text had waited and waited for God’s promises to come to pass

- They were standing in faith waiting for Him to work a miracle
- Apparently they were tempted to give up and quit
- Perhaps they were tempted to harbor such thoughts as...

“Why should we keep sitting around waiting for a promise that has never been fulfilled? If we cast away the promise, at least we can get up and get on with our lives. Waiting for God to fulfill His promise has kept us sitting here all these years when we could have moved on and done something else. Maybe we should just forget the Word of God and try to work out some kind of solution on our own.”

You Need Patience

“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:”

(Hebrews 10:36, NKJV)

- *“Endurance”* – a decision to stay in one spot and not move

Depicting a person under a great load of stress and pressure, who has decided to stay in one spot, no matter how difficult the situation

- Patience it is the staying power you need to hang in there and come out on top

“knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

(James 1:3, NKJV)

- *“Produces”* – something that is working downward with a tremendous force
- To work through from top to bottom
- Like a baker working yeast into a batch of dough by kneading it
- Patience needs to be worked through every fiber of a person’s being

When the Devil comes and says faith doesn’t work we need to prove our faith and be determined to not cast away our confidence

Yes, it may take time for your answer to manifest

Just because your request is in line with God's word and His perfect will for your life doesn't mean the answer will always come quickly without a hitch

- Satan is ultimately powerless to stop you
- Stand in faith and patience
- God's word cannot fail
- Make a decision once and for all
- Quitting is not an option
- I will not back down from my position of faith

“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:4, NKJV)

“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.”

(Hebrews 10:36–37, NKJV)

- The Lord always keeps His promises
- We have an enemy that will try to get us to become offended, bitter, and ultimately give up
- Hold on tight to what God has promised you as you carry out His will

God is in control of your situation, and He is working on your behalf, whether or not it feels like it or you see any results

- His Word is sure, and what He has promised will be fulfilled

So, refuse to cast away your confidence in His faithfulness, because receiving the answer to your prayer is only a matter of time!

Questions to ask yourself:

How would you describe your current heart attitude?

Is your heart filled with the love, joy, and peace of God's Spirit, or is it cluttered with offense and bitterness because of disappointments with life or people?

- What evidence confirms your answer?

Are you in a state of offense?

Have someone's actions or your life experience been so different from what you expected that it has caused you to trip, stumble, or lose your spiritual footing?

- If so, describe what happened
- As an act of your will, take time now to release that person or situation into God's hands

Are you dealing with a root of bitterness?

- Have you held on to offense so long that it has become rooted in your heart?
- Check your life to see if it bears evidence of any telltale signs of this sickness of the soul

For instance, when you hear a certain person's name or see his or her face, do you start feeling irritated and aggravated inside?

- Do you have negative thoughts and feelings about someone that just won't seem to go away?
- If you can identify with any of these symptoms, bitterness may have taken root
- Pray and ask the Lord to show you the true state of your heart, and repent of anything He reveals that grieves Him

The Word of God in the hands of His Holy Spirit is the greatest means for maintaining a pure, right heart

Be honest with yourself:

- How often do you presently invest time in prayer and in reading and meditating on Scripture?
- What can you do to increase your investment in God's presence and His Word?
- Pray and ask Him for fresh ideas to fill your spirit with more of Him!