

EXCERPT



Sacred Endurance *Finding Grace and Strength for a Lasting Faith*

November 12, 2019 | \$16, 192 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4578-1

Life can be hard, faith can wane, and distractions abound. How can we persevere to the end? Offering encouragement and hope for us to run the race well, Trillia Newbell shares theological insights and practical disciplines to train us for faithful, godly living over the long haul. While life may be full of challenges, we have a true and real hope in Jesus, who provides us with what we need to endure.

Called to a Race

I thoroughly enjoy health and athletics. I've spent most of my life either doing a sport or teaching others about fitness. In my adulthood, fitness hasn't been just a hobby for me; at one time it was a career path. I taught group fitness classes, trained fitness instructors, and even owned a small fitness studio. Though I no longer do fitness professionally, it continues to be an important part of who I am.

Here's the thing I've learned about fitness: it takes time, effort, patience, falling on your face in agony at times, and lots and lots of enduring. You don't wake up one day, decide to run a marathon, and then run it that evening. You have to train your body and mind for months. You have to endure difficult workouts, setbacks, and the daily routine required. Even then, getting to the finish line may be a slow process. And some quit.

This is what it's like to run the Christian race as well. We learn how to work the muscles of godly pursuits that result in sanctification; this is our sacred endurance. I'm motivated as a believer not because I have to but because I get to. Yet obstacles, real-life struggles, hard circumstances, and ordinary life make running the life of faith difficult. I've had my fair share of difficulties, including the death of my father and sister, four miscarriages, and a number of other painful experiences and circumstances—from health scares to broken relationships. Church life hasn't always been sunshine and rainbows, especially because I'm part of an ethnic minority. During a season of bitterness, repentance seemed a daily duty, and relief seemed far away.

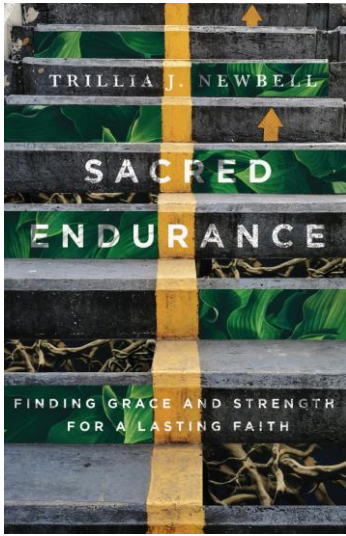
All this to say, it won't be easy. But you and I have been called to endure, to walk worthily, and to be imitators of Christ. And we're compelled to continue the race because of the saving work that Jesus has accomplished for us, independent of any efforts of our own.

One difference between a track-and-field race and the Christian race is that in the second we don't finish in our own strength. We don't have to find every muscle fiber in our body and practice "mind over matter" to finish. Instead we have great promises in the Word of God that help us realize that he is running this race with us and that the Holy Spirit is at work within us to equip us and empower us in the race. God has ultimate control, and holding onto that reality can bring us rest and peace.

Our strength and abilities don't come through our own doing; you and I are equipped and strengthened by the Lord. Too often, however, this life of faith is confusing as we think through our circumstances and as we fight our personal battles with sin and temptation. How do these two fit together: are we truly saved by grace, or do we have to work really hard? Perhaps it seems you must earn your salvation and that the prize at the finish line depends completely on your own effort. Or maybe you've given up. Instead of running that difficult stretch, you collapsed and decided it was simply too hard, too painful, or too discouraging.



Krista Clayton, associate director of publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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"The longer I live, the more I want to finish the Christian race well and hear the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' Trillia Newbell's newest book, Sacred Endurance, offers practical and personal encouragement to faithfully live the Christian life, daily looking to Jesus. Amid life's hardships and struggles, her words will refresh your soul and spur you on in the race."

Melissa Kruger, director of women's content at The Gospel Coalition, author of *In All Things*

Maybe you've tried and tried, and now that you've tasted grace, you think the best way to finish the race is simply to run the race however you want. So instead of running the circle of the track, you're going to run zigzags, just because you can. Yes, you're free to do that, even if those zigzags aren't what the Master intended. Some leave the track entirely and pursue a different destination.

How do you endure in fighting sin with faith? How exactly do you fight temptations? Do you even have endurance? Is it possible to work hard in fighting temptation and sin without becoming prideful and falling into the mindset that your salvation is based on your efforts rather than on grace? Is it better to throw up your hands in what feels like a pointless fight against sin and relish the unconditional love and grace of God?

In this book, I explore the importance of enduring, the grace available to us, the challenges we face, the pursuit of godliness, and the prize you and I can look forward to. You'll read stories about the Christian life—sometimes successes, sometimes struggles—and about endurance and motivation to push on toward Jesus.

God commands us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. And he says that he will finish the good work he began in us (Phil 1:6). He who called us is faithful, and "he will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:24). Our life is a fight of faith, and we'll explore how to exercise spiritually for it. We'll look at some of the character traits—such as perseverance, faithfulness, patience, sacrifice, and even risk—that are developed in us as we walk.

Let me also share what *Sacred Endurance* is *not* about. This book is not about theological debates on assurance or perseverance; it's not about whether or not you can lose your salvation. I will not try to convince you to believe a certain doctrine. Instead I'll work under the assumption that we will endure to the end. Enduring to the end doesn't mean not failing (and by failing I mean failing miserably); it means that when we come to our end, we're still believing and trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We're still repentant and resting in him. Let's assume that if we've truly placed our faith and trust in the work of Jesus Christ, our salvation is secure.

Sacred Endurance helps us peek under the curtain of real-life struggles while running the race set before us. There are reasons people don't endure to the end. What are they? Some theologians suggest that if a person doesn't endure to the end, he or she was never a believer. Maybe. But we want to prepare for the reasons that make it simply hard to live, and we want to be able to say that out loud without shame. I hope we'll see that we aren't alone in the struggle and that we can endure by God's grace.

—Adapted from chapter one, "Called to a Race"



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Trillia Newbell is director of community outreach for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. A frequent conference speaker, her writing has appeared in *Christianity Today*, *Desiring God*, *The Gospel Coalition*, and more. Her books include *Enjoy, Fear and Faith*, *United*, and *God's Very Good Idea*. She and her family live near Nashville. Visit her website and read her blog at trillianewbell.com.

Why and How Do We Endure in the Faith?

"This is the best book on endurance I have ever read. As I began, I knew this book was going to be different—Trillia Newbell has given us something that is deeply wise, practical at every turn, and laden with illuminating illustrations. Again and again she points us to Jesus and reminds us each time that the hope for our endurance is not found in our faithfulness but rather made possible because of his. You 'don't have to dread the race ahead; you can look at the road ahead with anticipation and hope. This book will tell you why."

—Paul David Tripp, pastor and author of *New Morning Mercies*

What inspired the ideas behind *Sacred Endurance*?

Trillia Newbell: I saw my own need for hope to endure. The past few years have been incredibly difficult both politically and personally. I needed a reminder for why we endure in the faith and how we do it. I'm in the middle of my race, and reminding myself that God will keep me and has given me the tools to finish well was important. And I know I'm not alone. As I look at the landscape of evangelicalism, I see broken relationships, confusion, division, and cynicism. My hope is that this book will help us all to look to the author and finisher of our faith and set our minds on eternity.

What is the message at the heart of this book?

Trillia: Salvation isn't the end of our journey into Christianity—it's the beginning, and in order to finish the race set before us, we will need to remember and cling to our Savior. We will need tools like prayer and meditation, and we will need the church. You and I will fail. We can't run this race perfectly, but we will never be defeated. God promises to finish the good work he began.

What are some points you hope to leave with readers?

Trillia:

- God promises to finish the good work he began in you and will never leave you nor forsake you.
- The Christian walk is hard and we aren't promised easy lives, but we are promised an ever-present help in our Savior.
- God has given us ordinary tools to help us run the race such as prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and the church.
- Although we will suffer, it doesn't compare to the glory to be revealed. We are running a race that will end with eternal rewards.



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