

Seven Principles for the Long Middle

What perseverance actually asks of you when the trial doesn't end on schedule

By R.S. Ellis, author of *Principles to Live By* — available at [The Christian Focus](#)

We are good at telling the beginning of a hard story, and we are very good at telling the end. Someone stands up in a service and says, “Two years ago I lost the job, and look what God did.” The room exhales. Somebody cries.

But that testimony skipped about seven hundred days.

It skipped the Tuesday in month four when nothing had changed and no one called. It skipped the prayers that got shorter and shorter until they were one word long. It skipped the part where the person telling the story wasn't sure it would have an ending at all.

That's the long middle. Almost nobody talks about it, which is a problem, because at any given moment most of us are living in it.

The reason I wrote *Principles to Live By* is that in seasons like that, feelings are unreliable and circumstances are unreadable — and what holds is a principle you decided on before you needed it. Here are seven of them, one for each day this week.

1. The middle is the process, not the delay

Here's what happens to us. We hear testimonies told backwards, from the far side, where every hard thing has already been assigned a purpose. Then we look at our own situation, which has no shape yet and no ending, and conclude that something has gone wrong with us specifically.

It hasn't. You're standing inside a story that hasn't been edited yet.

James writes to people in exactly that spot:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” — James 1:2-4

Look at that phrase — *let perseverance finish its work*. Finishing implies duration. It means the middle is not a hold-up in the process; the middle **is** the process.

God isn't late. He's thorough. From the inside, those look identical.

2. Honesty is not the opposite of faith

There's a quiet pressure to be encouraging about your own suffering while you're still inside it. To answer "how are you doing?" with "blessed," and mean about forty percent of it.

Psalm 13 has no interest in that.

"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" — Psalm 13:1

He asks it, then asks it again, and again, all before verse three. And he isn't journaling privately. This is a worship song. It was handed to the music director and sung by the whole assembly.

God not only tolerated the question, He put it in the hymnal.

If you've stopped praying because you didn't like the tone of your own prayers, start again with the tone you actually have. God is not fragile, and neither, it turns out, is your faith — it survived the honesty test fine. Three verses later the same man writes, *"But I trust in your unfailing love."* Same psalm, six verses long, and nothing in his circumstances changed in between. What changed is that he said the hard part out loud and kept Speaking.

3. Faithfulness is a repetition, not a feeling

On the days you can't feel anything, the temptation is to wait for the feeling before you do anything. Wait to feel like praying. Wait to feel like going back to church. Wait to feel like calling the friend back.

That's backwards, and Paul says so bluntly:

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." — Galatians 6:9

Don't wait for the better preferred time." Now is the *proper* time, . Your job in the meantime is smaller and duller than you want it to be: don't give up.

So make your bed. Send the text you've been avoiding. Show up where you said you would. Pray boldly, pray short, pray anyway. None of that will feel like faith. It **is** faith. On a hard day, faith is almost indistinguishable from stubbornness, and God appears to count it the same. *Check the section on how to endure through the crucible. [Find it in my book, Principles to live By.](#)*

4. Hope comes last, and it comes in order

Romans 5 contains a sequence I keep returning to, because it explains why the middle has to be long:

"...we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame." — Romans 5:3-5

Suffering → perseverance → character → hope.

Notice where hope sits. It's **last**. Hope isn't the thing you summon at the start to get you through; it's what gets produced in you at the end of a chain, and every link takes time to form.

That reframes the whole question. You're not stuck. You're being made into someone — someone with a load capacity you don't have yet, who won't fold next time, because this time didn't fold them.

You cannot skip a step and arrive at hope early. Nobody can. The people you admire for their steadiness didn't get it in a moment. They got it in a middle.

5. Two intentions can run through the same events

If you want a number for how long a middle can run: Joseph received a dream as a teenager and stood before Pharaoh at thirty. Between those moments — a pit, a sale into slavery, a false accusation, a prison sentence, and a man who promised to remember him and then forgot for two more years.

Thirteen years. Nobody was filming his highlight reel. At no point in those thirteen years did the situation look like it was heading anywhere good, and at several points it looked like it was heading somewhere much worse.

What he says at the end is one of the strangest sentences in Scripture:

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." — Genesis 50:20

Same events. Two intentions running through them at once. One of them wins.

Joseph doesn't say the harm wasn't real, and he doesn't tell his brothers that what they did was secretly fine. He says God was working the whole time, underneath, in a direction none of them could see from inside it.

Your years are not lost years. They may be years you would never choose again. Those are different things.

6. “Yet” is a decision, not a mood

The most demanding verse I know sits at the end of Habakkuk. The prophet lists, item by item, everything that has failed:

*“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, **yet I will rejoice in the Lord**, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” — Habakkuk 3:17-18*

He does not pretend. He inventories the loss in detail first — the harvest, the herds, the food. And then, with none of it fixed, he says *yet*.

That one word is the whole thing. Not “praise God, it's fine.” It isn't fine. He is rejoicing in a Person, not in a situation, and by that point the two had come completely apart.

This is the clearest example I know of what a principle even is: something you decide is true, and then act on when your circumstances are arguing the opposite. Praise before the harvest is a different kind of praise than praise after it. Harder — and I suspect louder.

7. You don't have to feel renewed — you have to be here tomorrow

If you've read this far, there's a decent chance the trial you're in isn't over, and nothing here has ended it.

So take this instead:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

— 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Paul had been beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and left for dead. He is not being flippant about your trouble. He's telling you where the renewal is happening: *inwardly*, and *day by day*. Not all at once, and not necessarily anywhere you can see yet.

You don't have to feel renewed today. You just need to be ready for tomorrow.
That's the whole assignment for the long middle time.

A prayer for the middle:

God, I'm tired. Not dramatic, not faithless, just tired. You know exactly how long this has been. I'm not going to pretend it's fine, and I'm not going to stop talking to You. Do the slow work in me that I can't see, speed it up. Renew something today. Anything. And when the harvest comes, let me remember who carried me through the part nobody watched. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

The seven, in one place

1. The middle is the process, not the delay — **James 1:2-4**
1. Honesty is not the opposite of faith — **Psalms 13**
2. Faithfulness is a repetition, not a feeling — **Galatians 6:9**
3. Hope comes last, and it comes in order — **Romans 5:3-5**
4. Two intentions can run through the same events — **Genesis 50:20**
5. "Yet" is a decision, not a mood — **Habakkuk 3:17-19**
6. You don't have to feel renewed — you have to be here tomorrow — **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Scripture quoted from the New International Version.

About the book

Principles to Live By —How to Become The Man, That All Men Respect, And all women Adore.

The seven above are the ones that matter most in a hard season, but they're part of a larger set. You must set convictions worth battling **before** you need them, so that when the trial comes you're not trying to build a foundation and stand on it at the same time.

****Available at [The Christian Focus](#)****

If this found you in a hard season: you're not behind, and you're not alone in it. If it made you think of someone, send it to them instead of posting it.
