

# Perseverance

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## Introduction.

- A. As we have been doing every Sunday night for quite a while now, we're going to draw our topic this evening from 2 Peter 1:5-8. As those of you who have been paying attention know, we've made our way through faith, virtue, knowledge, and self-control, and have now arrived at perseverance. With any thought at all, it quickly becomes obvious why perseverance is important to the Christian and why Peter lists it here. We can start off like gangbusters with all the other attributes mentioned so far, but unless we persevere in doing good, our earlier work becomes meaningless. We're the spiritual equivalent of fireworks. We go up really high really fast, do spectacular things for a little while, then fade away to nothing. That neither helps us nor pleases God.
- B. It's easy for us to understand the importance of perseverance, but it's hard to actually persevere. Take, for instance, an activity that is familiar to all too many of us: the diet. We know that eating healthy is important. We don't want to go through life looking like a parade balloon on Thanksgiving Day, and we don't want to die of a heart attack at age 55 either. So we determine that we're going to start eating things that are good for us in portions that are good for us. We do really well at this for about a week or two, then most people start backsliding. A handful of chips sneaks in here, a dip of ice cream sneaks in there, and pretty soon we're back to eating the way we want to, with no good health effects at all. We have perseverance problems.
- C. Certainly, we don't want to have the same struggles in our spiritual lives. After all, the spiritual effects of failing to persevere are far worse than a heart attack. We need perseverance training, training that we best accomplish by looking to God's word. Let's see what it tells us this evening about perseverance.

## I. What It Is.

- A. As always, we need to make sure that we're on the same page when it comes to the concept of perseverance. We need to figure out what it is. The passage in the Bible that does probably the best job of illuminating this is Hebrews 12:1-2. Basically, perseverance, or endurance as this passage says—it's the same word in the Greek—is what keeps you running once you start running. In the physical world, this does a lot to explain why I am not a runner. Some part of me suffers from the delusion that I am, and every year or so I lace up the running shoes and go out on a morning jog. However, I don't stick with it because I don't have perseverance. When I start getting that massive stitch in my side and feeling like I'm going to throw up, that to me seems like a really good reason to quit. When I've been running for two weeks, and I don't really see any sign of improvement, and I'm not enjoying it, I'm not inspired to keep going for the sake of the goal.
- B. Probably all of us have similar areas in our lives where we aren't as persevering as we would like to be, and we can smile at those things, but when it comes to the spiritual realm, lack of perseverance is no laughing matter. When we give up on the race to heaven, we inevitably end up spending eternity not with God, but with the devil and his angels. That's exactly why we can't quit. When we come to a point in our lives when the Christian life is keeping us from something we really want to do, which could be anything from drinking to divorce, we have to keep putting one foot in front of the other. When we've been a Christian for five months, or five years, or 50 years, and it seems like our lives aren't changing, and all the people at church are just as weak and lukewarm as they ever were, we can't give up. We have to keep going. We have to persevere.

## II. Where It Comes From.

- A. Now, for this reason alone, I think all of us would say that we can't have enough perseverance. That's why it's important for us to learn where it comes from and how we can get it. The basic source of perseverance is described in Colossians 1:11. If we are Christians, the power of God will help us persevere. To me, this is an extremely heartening thought. After all, I'm the guy who can't stick to a running program for more than a few weeks. I'm the guy whose house is littered with half-finished products that I'll get back to someday. If I show such limited strength of will in small-scale physical things, how can I possibly find it within myself to stay faithful to the Lord for my entire life? The first answer to that question is that I can't. The second answer is that I don't have to. As long as I want to stay faithful, God will help me with the strength I need to get there.
- B. There are a number of different avenues that God can use to help us to persevere. I suspect that sometimes, especially in answer to our prayers, God works in a direct, unknowable way. At other times, though, God works indirectly, by using other things and other people to help us build the endurance we need. We see one of these things mentioned in Romans 15:4. This passage describes the encouragement of the perseverance of the Scriptures. Here's what Paul is talking about: In the Bible, we see stories of all kinds of faithful people, people like us, and for a lot of those people, life wasn't always good. Just like we do, they faced trial, persecution, and the subtle dangers of apathy. However, despite those challenges, they kept going, and they received the reward that God promised. From there, friends, it's just a matter of common sense. If these

ordinary human beings could find the strength from God to keep going, to keep being faithful and serving Him, we can find that strength too, and we can find the rest and reward at the end that they found. These stories encourage us by showing that if those people of faith could persevere through trial, we can too.

- C. Sometimes, though, God finds it necessary or useful to teach us perseverance through tribulation. Consider Paul's unusual reaction to this in Romans 5:3. Paul says that he learned to rejoice in tribulation because of the effect that it had. As I've said before, I don't believe that God is the source of trial in the lives of the righteous, but He does allow it, and one of the reasons why He does allow it is so that the trial will bring us closer to Him. It increases our faith and makes us more useful for service. To return to the same analogy we've been using, it's why a normal, out-of-shape person who wants to run a marathon doesn't show up on race day without having trained first. For all of us non-runners, trying to run a marathon would kill us. Instead, the non-runner will build up to running those 26 miles. He'll start out running a mile a day, suffering a little bit with that mile, then day after day, increasing his distance until he reaches the point where running a marathon is hard, but doable. It's the same with us. As we overcome trial, we build spiritual endurance.
- D. One final source of perseverance in our lives should come as no surprise to any Christian, and that source is the comfort of other godly people. Along these lines, Paul discusses the way he helps the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:6. His experience with overcoming trial taught him how to comfort the church so that its members could endure through their trials. This spiritual encouragement, this sharing of burdens, is one of the most valuable things we get out of being associated with a church. Sadly, there are a lot of Christians who don't take advantage of this. When they encounter hard times in their lives, their instinct is to pull back, to hide their struggles from their brethren and lick their wounds in private. Now, I don't think it's necessarily a sin to do that, but I guarantee you that when we isolate ourselves from other Christians, for whatever reason, it makes Satan very, very happy. An isolated Christian is a vulnerable Christian, and he's able to attack a saint like that from all sides, exerting all his powers to pull them down. And friends, if we're by ourselves and trial gets us down, there's nobody to pick us back up again. Let's gain endurance from each other.

### III. What It Does.

- A. Once we put all this effort into developing perseverance in our lives, we're guaranteed to see results. We'll learn about what perseverance can do for us. First of all, perseverance is what makes us spiritually complete. James tells us so in James 1:2-4. In this text, "patience" is the same Greek word that we've been looking at all along, and so this text tells us that once perseverance completes its job in our lives, we will be complete as Christians. Think of it as a spiritual education. Once I completed my preacher training under Max and David at Dowlen Road, I was presumably ready to be unleashed on the world. I was now equipped to handle whatever situations the work would throw at me. In the same way, once we have persevered through trial, that experience endows us with the faith and the determination to handle anything else that comes our way.
- B. Likewise, if we persevere, it leads to us bearing fruit. Consider Jesus' comment on this at the end of the parable of the soils in Luke 8:15. Once again, it's the same Greek word, and once again, it points to an important attribute of endurance. If we want to see spiritual results from anything we're doing for the Lord, we have to keep at it and refuse to give up, no matter what. I think this is a problem that a lot of Christians have. They obeyed the gospel years or decades ago, but since that time, they've just let life carry them along while remaining minimally faithful. As a result, Christians like that never grow, and they never accomplish anything useful in the Lord's work. Thankfully, in this congregation, I see a number of Christians who are doing the opposite. They have determined to grow spiritually and be useful, and they're sticking to it. Know what, friends? Even in the short time I've been here, I've seen Christians like that achieve their goals. They're much better off spiritually than they were three years ago, and it's because they persevered. As much as anything else, one of my main goals here as a preacher is to see everyone here grow like that. I want this congregation to have a 100% maturation rate. That's something to which we should all aspire, so that we can, every one of us, be a useful member of the body. We can all get there together, but we have to persevere.
- C. Finally, perseverance is the only way by which we can receive the promises. The Hebrews writer points to this in Hebrews 10:36. Notice the way that the structure of this verse parallels the structure of this point of the lesson. We began by looking at spiritual completeness, then we looked at bearing fruit, which is a result of spiritual completeness, and now we're looking at the result of bearing fruit—receiving the promise from God. I warn you solemnly, brethren, unless we endure until the end, we won't make it to heaven. Let's think about why this would be true. As just about all of us know, we are saved by grace through faith. We can't get ourselves to heaven, so we need Christ to get us there. However, the saving faith of the Bible is an obedient faith. If we truly believe, we will do, and indeed, we will continue to do. If we ever stop doing, if we ever stop persevering, that's a big red flag to God that in fact, we don't believe the promises anymore. Friends, heaven isn't for people who don't care about serving God and don't want to work to get there. It's for people who want to do what's right but fail, but who try their best anyway. When our life on earth ends, if we want everlasting life, that's where we have to be, and it's impossible to be there without perseverance.

**Conclusion.** If you want to start that journey that leads to heaven, tonight is the best possible time.