

EXPERENCING PERSEVERING FAITH

"Do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised."(Hebrews 10:35-36)

It is hard to persevere when day after day passes and there is little evidence of change. Yet we are commanded to hang on to the confidence of things unseen. We are told in Scripture to believe and keep on praying. We see such persistence—In the Garden of Gethsemane where, "Once more He (Jesus) went away and prayed the same thing."(Mark 14:39) We are reminded as we read the Bible to pray, pray, and pray some more. Paul prayed 3 times about a thorn in the flesh. (2 Cor. 12:8, 9) In Matt.7:7-8 we are told to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking.

Real Biblical faith is persistent faith. These trials over a period of time will either make us bitter or better. We must not forget the benefits that come from perseverance:

1. Persevering in faith is preparation for blessings. God is getting us ready for what He has already gotten for us. Our persistence in faith is not for God, but for us. Perseverance is about releasing control and being obedient to honoring God's desires, interests and timetable—it is obeying with a right attitude, knowing God has everything under His control. We must not forget that in the midst of the pain and uncertainty in life, there is beauty. I must consciously look for that beauty because even on the coldest days of winter, there is an evergreen tree, a beautiful snowflake, a wonderful sunset, the promises of God's love, and most of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It will help us to persist in faith when we behold creation, which put us on the front row of the Theater of the Almighty. "The heavens are telling the glory of God." (Psalm 19:1) Seeing, feeling, hearing, and smelling the miracle of creation enables us to daily be in God's theater of glory. Jean Bodin in his 16th century work "The Theater of the Universe of Nature" put it this way: "We have come into this theater of the world for no other reason than to understand the admirable power, goodness and wisdom of the most excellent creator of all things, to the extent that this is possible, by contemplating the appearance of the universe and all His actions and individual works, and thus to be swept away more ardently in praise to Him."

It is God's purpose that we hear His music of creation and come to love Him, the Composer of all. Jonathan Edwards described in his work **Personal Narrative** what it means to have our eyes and ears opened to the theater of His glory. "As I was walking there and looking up into the sky and clouds, there

came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction... it was a sweet and gentle and holy majesty.”

2. Perseverance in faith enables us to become a witness to others who are going through difficult times. While we are waiting for the answers to our prayers, God is causing the immature traits of impatience, unrealistic expectations, selfish ambition and the desire to control to melt away. It's so easy, as we await the answers of our prayers, to allow hopelessness to set in, causing us to give up. I know I must always remind myself that things aren't always the way they appear. In 2 kings 6:15 we see Elisha's servant panicking because it appears that he and Elisha are surrounded by enemy soldiers. Elisha's response is, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prayed, 'O Lord open his eyes so he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."(2 Kings 6:15,16)
3. Persevering Faith spells out full assurance in the heart. This translates into experiencing, "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding."(Phil.4:7) This peace is possible when the **F** in our faith is full, the **a** is assurance, the **i** is in, the **t** is the, and the **h** spells heart. This full assurance in the heart was not present in the lives of the disciples when they encountered a storm in Mark 4:35-41. We are like those disciples when, in the middle of the storms of life, we feel nothing is happening and the Lord seems distant and unconcerned.

It's easy to think that Jesus may be with me, but He's asleep in the back of the boat. Then we think it is our job to wake him up—In Mark 4:38-40 the disciples woke Him up and said to Him, "Teacher don't you care if we drown!" Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and said to the waves "Quiet! Be still." Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Jesus' question implies that He expected them not to doubt or be fearful in such situations. In verse 35 of this chapter 4 of Mark, we see Jesus saying, "Let's us go over to the other side." As we go to the other side—we frequently encounter storms. As we move to this other side—from victim to victor—whether it's in our marriage, ministry, job, etc., things will often seem like they are being turned upside down as Jesus takes us to a better place in these relationships. Sometimes we may feel like we are going to sink. At moments like that we must remember not to let the winds of hopelessness cause us to jump overboard. We can

remain steadfast, as we have full assurance in our heart that God has everything under control.

1 Peter 4:12 says, “Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange trial were happening to you.” Some have convinced themselves that if one is really with Jesus, they will have a storm-free life. That is not true. The disciples were with Jesus and found themselves in the middle of a storm. These storms will drive us into a deeper relation with Jesus if we will listen to His direction in the middle of the storms of life. As James 1:5-7 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does,”

4. Preserving Faith does not come by striving, but by resting on the promises of God. This means that because God has said it in His word, I am going to believe it. This means as I ride out these storms in life, I will turn off those “crazy tapes” of hopelessness going around and around in my mind. If these negative thoughts of hopelessness are allowed to persist, they will snowball, wiping me out. If I don’t take my thoughts captive, they will captivate me and thrust me into the pits of hopelessness and depression. Paul tells us in 2 Cor.10:5 to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. In Phil. 4:8 we are told, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” I must examine my thoughts and take captive the ones that cause me to fear or doubt. I can’t let fear or doubt enslave my mind.

Andrew Murray stated when facing times of despair, you must learn to say: (1.) I am here by God’s appointment (2.) I am here in God’s keeping (3.) I am here under God’s training (4.) I am here in God’s timing. St. Paul never saw a setback—He always saw it as an opportunity to advance the gospel. In Phil.1:12, he says, “What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” When there was a financial need, he said one person’s need is another person’s opportunity for generosity. (2 Cor.8:24). When his enemies wanted to kill Paul, he declared in Phil.1:20, “Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” Let us continue, in spite of the obstacles, to move forward in persevering faith, knowing that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”(Rom.8:28)

5. A Faith that Perseveres is one that results from meditating not only on God's Word but also his Works. The question is, Are you stressed and feeling the pressure of the moment? Do you have so many things to do that you don't know where to start? Then come to the theater of His glory and behold the wonders of creation as Bonaventura expresses: "All the creatures of this sensible world lead the soul of the wise and contemplative person to the eternal God, since they are the shadows, echoes and pictures, the vestiges, images and manifestations of that most powerful, most wise and best first principle, of that eternal origin, light and fullness, of that productive, exemplary and order-giving Art. They are set before us for the sake of our knowing God, and are divinely given signs. For every creature is by its very nature a kind of portrayal and likeness of that eternal Wisdom."

That eternal wisdom was revealed in Jesus Christ. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."(Col.1:15-17)

Jesus is our ticket to the theater of God's Glory. He is the way, the truth and the life. Through Him and the redemption He provides so that we are able to come to the Triune God and the wonders of His glory reflected in creation and revealed through the scriptures. The sin, which destroys the wonder and beauty of creation, is conquered through the Risen Christ. Now we can be reconciled to God as described in Col.1:21, 22: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight."

This reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is testified to through the reading of the scriptures and the wonders of creation. Such daily reading enables us to be present in the theater of His glory and develop a faith that perseveres in the reality of His presence.

6. Persevering Faith is a Living faith that is caught rather than taught. It is a faith that cries "Carpe Diem", Seize the day. This happens as you stop living for yourself and start directly helping those in need. We were created to seize the day for Jesus has declared. "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness."(John 10:10) It's a fact that where God's agenda is championed,

God's resources are channeled. God's agenda involves reaching out to those in need in both word and deed. In Matt.25:40, Jesus teaches, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did it to Me." It takes a persevering faith to confront a system of power where the rich continue to get richer while the poor are getting poorer. As so many of the poor and elderly are being cut off Medicaid, having their utilities shut off and ending up homeless, the time has come for the people of God to arise and rebuild a community of compassion. In Neh.2:17-18, Nehemiah points out that a successful rebuilding program involves a plan of faith that is specific and well researched. This plan clearly defines the problem and identifies the problem. It proposes a "we" solution and gives a clear strong challenge. "Come, let us rebuild... and we will no longer be in disgrace." It's motivation at the deepest level, declaring, "let's make a difference." The plan of faith helps others see God's hand in the vision. "I also told them about the gracious hand of God." In order for persevering faith to be caught, it means action must take place and that involves explaining how others may get involved. The result is, "they replied, 'Let us start rebuilding,' So they began this good work."

Coming together, working and worshipping with others is essential not only for success on a given project, but also in the development of a faith that will persevere in spite of the obstacles. In order to come together in this way and let living, persevering faith flow, we must be emptied of self and be filled with God "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

7. A Living Persevering Faith is possible only when we totally surrender to God's will for our lives. This means putting faith into practice, for a testimony is only possible when we encounter a test and surrender to God and in Him find the victory. In Hebrews 11, we see each word that describes what the person did as an action word. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice; Enoch was taken from this life; Abraham by faith obeyed and went. By faith Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter any longer. By "faith some conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames," and much more. Hebrews 4:2 says, "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." Persevering faith is applied by trusting God's work, acting on that trust and surrendering ourselves to His will and purpose for our lives.

What is that obstacle you are facing? Are you going to surrender to the enemies of faith, including discouragement, disillusionment and desensitization toward the homeless and hurting, or are you going to surrender to God's will for your life? The decision you make today will influence the rest of your life. To decide to follow Jesus means to continue on in persevering faith, knowing that God has everything under control and He is love. This involves dying to ourselves and being resurrected in Jesus Christ. "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."(Col.3:3) As Paul proclaimed, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."(Phil.1:21) That is the invitation being offered to us today. The invitation to die to ourselves and the sin that enslaves and to be resurrected in the eternal freedom Christ provides. Once this happens, we are free to persevere in faith, knowing that Christ lives in us and will never leave us nor forsake us.

Questions For Experiencing Persevering Faith

1. What do you think persevering faith is and why is it necessary? What does Heb.10:35, 36 mean when it says don't throw away your confidence?
2. How can it be said that persevering in faith is preparation for blessing?
3. In what ways does persevering in faith enable us to become a witness to others who are going through hard times?
4. How does the phrase "Full Assurance In The Heart" spell out a persevering faith that endures in spite of the circumstances?
5. What does it mean that persevering faith does not come by striving but by resting on the promises of God? Why is it important then that we bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor.10:5, Phil.4:8)
6. Why is it that a faith, which perseveres, is one that results from mediation not only on the Word of God but the Works of God?

7. Preserving Faith is a Living Faith that is caught rather than taught. What does this statement mean to you?
8. Why is a Living Persevering Faith only possible when we totally surrender to God's will for our lives?
9. Please explain Hebrews 4:2 and apply it to your personal life concerning why the gospel only is of value when it is combined with faith?
10. What does it mean that the invitation being offered to us is to die to ourselves and be resurrected to Christ and the persevering faith He provides?

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