

## Practicing Perseverance

Some well-intentioned Christian evangelists portray Christianity as a sanctuary from the battles of the world. It is not. God's saving grace frees us from the world's captive allure in order that we will engage in effective combat. Hell-bound souls refuse to battle for righteousness in this world, and only when it is too late they shall discover that their hell is an intense battle without cessation, without peace and without victory. The Christian is provisioned to battle effectively against shrinking back from his commitment to his Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Christlike perseverance is the most challenging obligation God imposes upon His heirs. God commands you to bear up consistently and courageously under the press of this life. No Christian virtue, no Scriptural command, no divine imperative can be fulfilled without perseverance. Perseverance is an essential personal constitutional temperament for the Christian. You cannot resist the pressures of the world unless you are committed to persevering.<sup>2</sup>

You do not desire a partial occasional faith, but a universal, influential and effective faith. You began your journey with the Lord without any effort on your part.<sup>3</sup> Now your charge is to persevere in the strength of the Lord to do His good pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

Why does God allow you to be tried by a fallen world? So that you might evangelize and edify your culture by proving you are different from the world surrounding you. So that you might example the Holy Spirit of perseverance dwelling within you.

God says, "Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup> Trials persuade you not to think of this world as heaven thereby strengthening your separation from your temporal world.

Difficult times are the sanctified occasions for the garnering of perseverance. You cannot learn perseverance unless you are subject to the world's troubles.<sup>6</sup> In addition, you cannot grow in your ability to persevere without the strength of the Holy Spirit.

A senior football player for a major university bears witness to the endurance the Christian can access when he walks in the influence of God's Spirit:

"On Tuesday morning around 10:00 a.m. I injured my left knee during two-a-day practices doing an exercise that I'd done a thousand times before. Something popped, loudly enough for most people within 20 yards to hear, and Wednesday afternoon the results of the MRI came back with the news that I'd torn my anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). This brought my senior football season and career to a disturbingly abrupt halt.

"These are uncharted waters. I've never sustained an injury this serious and I am not altogether comfortable with having to stop playing a game that I love, especially after

having missed only one season since the fourth grade. That wasn't supposed to happen until January, but....

“What I really want to tell you about, indeed shout about, is how amazingly God is demonstrating His sovereignty, love, grace and affection in what should be a trying time. I'm still reading and studying my way through the Bible, and as only my precious heavenly Father would have it, the day before my knee was injured I finished the book of Job. During my reading of the book, I actually consciously pondered the possibility of God bringing something trying into my life. Who knew what would happen? Of course, other than Him!

“As I was still lying in the grass clutching my knee, and believe me this was not of myself, the only thing that I could think or say was, ‘Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.’ Then immediately before I was even off the ground, two verses shouted into my mind: ‘Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?’ (Job 2:10). And, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord’ (Job 1:21).

“It was as though the Master had physically touched me and audibly whispered, ‘I know this is painful, but I love you so much and I have a plan.’ What a tender, merciful, loving God is ours! How sovereign! He prepared me for what He knew was coming and my gratitude to Him is beyond description.

“The physical injury has already been worth the demonstration of His love. I know not what else He has in store, but let all of my bones and sinews be dashed if it will result in as gracious an outpouring as this. Never has He drawn nearer and never have I felt more intimately loved by my Creator and King. His love, grace and sovereignty are truly baffling.”

How can your walk with your Lord Jesus become as joyously and thankfully persevering as this brother of yours? Perhaps in the power of the Holy Spirit you can adopt the disciplines that strengthen the Christian's resolve. What are these disciplines?

#### ❖ **A Thoroughly God-centered Life**

Scripture disallows any distinction between secular pursuits and religious interests.<sup>7</sup> All of your life is God's. Compartmentalizing is for unbelieving professors, not faithful possessors of Christ.

True Christians are thoroughly Christian. Many professors of trust in Christ take the field of action though failing to keep the field. Christians fight under the banner of Jesus' gospel without flagging.

William Gurnall, a 17<sup>th</sup> Century English puritan, wrote: “Not he that sets out, but he that holds out in this holy war, deserves the name of a saint. There is not such a thing in this sense belonging to Christian as an honourable retreat; not such a word of command in all

Christ's military discipline, as fall back and lay down your arms; no, you must fall on, and stand to your arms till called off by death."<sup>8</sup>

Jesus is Lord – King of Kings and Lord of Lords.<sup>9</sup> The man attempting to un-Lord Jesus will soon discover that his feeble effort has had no affect upon Jesus and has only resulted in him being unmanned.<sup>10</sup> You are at every moment seeking His kingdom, His righteousness, His favor and His design upon your life.

God is your present circumstance and your eternal environment. "The Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear."<sup>11</sup> He never changes. When He sends you into a famine, He will provide ravens to feed you with all the meat and drink you need.<sup>12</sup>

It is reported that the Korean Christians suffering under the communist insurgence had a motto: "We are like nails. The harder you hit us, the deeper you drive us." Your blessings are limited to your willingness to drink deeply of the cup of the Man of Sorrows. The power, influence and affect of your life are determined by your self-denying willingness to experience and persevere through a baptism of suffering.

#### ❖ Dependence Upon Truth

Scripture contains all God has promised you.<sup>13</sup> As you press more deeply into the fullness of God's word, you will discover with penetrating clarity the purpose for the trials in your life. God makes the same promise to you He made to Jacob: "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."<sup>14</sup>

We grow weary of doing good because we neglect, ignore or abandon our trust in God's word. Refuse to believe the devil even when he tells the truth! Weariness is a hazard to perseverance.

Stay fastened to the truth.<sup>15</sup> Unbelief is the womb of independence. Un-faith alienates commitment from perseverance, and man from God. Play by God's rules for He has enlarged your heart to respond to the press of this world.

Beware, disobedience disables. Disallow shortcuts and other forms of malpractice in order to circumvent being maimed by the prince of darkness. God says, "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."<sup>16</sup>

Hudson Taylor, known as the father of modern missions, said, "It doesn't matter really how great the pressure is, it only matters *where the pressure lies*. See that it never comes *between* you and the Lord – then, the greater the pressure, the more it presses you to His breast."<sup>17</sup>

#### ❖ Exact Awareness of Self-deception

David petitioned God saying, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”<sup>18</sup> God’s king knew that he could not persevere in the matters of the Lord unless his heart was right with God.

Distrust your perception of you and your feelings about you. Disabuse from your mind the insinuation that you cannot fall or that you are too mature to be susceptible to certain temptations.<sup>19</sup> You will not persevere without self-awareness, so remain ever vigilant in your exercise of self-control.<sup>20</sup>

Sin requires a host, and the more accommodating the host, the greater the sin. Perseverers lay low every rebel lust. It is God who has loved you, given you birth, placed your name into His book of life, purchased you with the persevering blood of His Son, washed you with that same blood and clothed you in His righteousness. Immediacy is essential in diagnosing the spiritual stain and taking the appropriate measures to address that blemish.

The more perfectly you practice Christianity the closer Satan is drawn to you. The devil will call you to be the non-persevering rebel he has been. He wants you to fall from heaven.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Satan’s throne in this world is as temporary as was his perseverance in heaven.

Commit yourself to accept God’s word as your plumb line.<sup>22</sup> Examine your life daily by comparing your heart to the heart of God as revealed in His word. Tolerance of any sin in your life damages your ability to access objective absolute truth. You cannot rightly assess your spiritual strength in the midst of sheltering a sin in your life. Does your lifestyle and do your life choices conform to Jesus’ choices?<sup>23</sup>

#### ❖ **Cultivate a Transformed Mind**

Every trial is going to test your faith so that you might prove you truly possess the genuine article.<sup>24</sup> “Even so great men great losses should endure.”<sup>25</sup> You cannot persevere unless you have trained your mind to see “Him who is unseen.”<sup>26</sup> You must become skilled in fixing your “eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”<sup>27</sup>

Surrendering your mind to the merely visible effectuates a transfer of trust from God to man, from the eternal to the temporal, from the inspired, inerrant, infallible word to a world of bestial flesh. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>28</sup>

Perseverers refuse to be mere observers of what occurs around them. They grasp the significance of the events capturing the eternal intentions behind temporal occurrences.

Perseverers are confident knowing they can take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>29</sup> God promises the perseverer that he is “being transformed into the same image” of God’s holy persevering Son.<sup>30</sup>

Reliance upon your feelings rather than your Christ results in a decelerated halting hesitating perseverance. Look to Jesus and know that if an irritant did not rob Him of His sobriety, then you need not allow it to agitate you. Rise to your privileges as a child of royalty.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus is the ark, the brazen serpent and the mercy seat – He is your telestai.<sup>32</sup> Jesus is your God, your savior, your elder brother and your friend. He sent His Holy Spirit to instruct you in the art of persevering. In every difficulty you experience, envision Christ exemplifying the courage, patience and perfect perseverance that you can have in Him.<sup>33</sup> Pray that you “may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”<sup>34</sup> In Him, not in your circumstances, you live and move and have your being.<sup>35</sup>

#### ❖ **Anticipate Encounters**

Unanticipated encounters are the most difficult to endure. This world is not your home, so expect the stresses to be intense.<sup>36</sup> Because you are alien to this world, the xenophobia of the fallen world contributes to your afflictions.

Jesus says, “By your endurance you will gain your lives.”<sup>37</sup> Joseph’s tribulation and distress was unable to isolate him from God.<sup>38</sup> The stony words that came upon Caleb not only failed to separate him from God, they served to proclaim the specialness of his godly spirit.<sup>39</sup> Famine failed to disengage Ruth from God but rather brought her to God.<sup>40</sup> Esther submitted herself to King Ahasuerus’ sword for the Lord’s people, and Paul admitted his nakedness for Christ’s sake.<sup>41</sup>

Testing/hardship provide the stage for God to reveal Himself to you. Progress requires conflict. The tests, though appearing difficult, will be light in the early stages of your walk with the Lord. Increasing difficulty evidences God’s increased faith in you. William Gurnall said, “He that hath God’s heart cannot want his arm.”<sup>42</sup>

Your faith cannot be verified without crucibles of testing. Your enjoyment of Jesus’ abundant life is in direct proportion to your faithfulness in overcoming obstacles. Multitudes will never persevere for they are weak and perseverance is not now nor has it ever been a characteristic of the weak.<sup>43</sup>

Christians humbly expect their faith to be proven in the strain of life’s demands. You do not want your spiritual development stymied by becoming complacent, indulgent and non-maturing in your walk with Christ. Never become devotedly attached to where you are with the Lord, because He is not. God has no intention of leaving you where you are.

The more precious God's grace is to you, the greater is your willingness to be tried in the furnaces of this life. Athletes do not practice their skills for the purpose of being the best practicers. They practice in order to engage effectively in the game; they practice to win.

You have exchanged your life of ease for a life of holiness. Your exchanged life is centered upon Galatians 2:20. You know that "if you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?"<sup>44</sup>

Perseverers refusing to grow weary are gifted with peace. When you find yourself closest to despair, living in the blackest darkness you could ever imagine, without energy to take another step, you are most near to the victory you can have in Christ Jesus. It is in a dungeon that Joseph is gifted with discernment; it is in the belly of a fish that Jonah recognizes grace; it is in a wilderness that Jesus defeats Satan.<sup>45</sup>

Anticipate what others fail to see and you shall progress to where others can only dream. Inoculate yourself against tempting surprises. "Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>46</sup>

#### ❖ Epilogue

Have you ever contrasted the Christian's view of perseverance with the non-Christian's?

<i>Christian's</i>	vs.	<i>non-Christian's</i>
God expects and commands it		Unnecessary
Purifies and strengthens		Disintegrates and weakens
Natural for believers		Unnatural and abnormal
Assures eternal joy		Makes me unhappy
Identifies the believer with His Christ		Avoid at all costs

Jesus hung on a cross until He could declare, "It is finished."<sup>47</sup> Are you willing to persevere? Will you stand with Moses, Esther, Nehemiah and Paul? Or will you be found in the camps of the Pharaohs, Haman, Sanballat and Demas?

You shall press on that you may lay hold of that for which also you were laid hold of by Christ Jesus.<sup>48</sup> When Jesus laid hold of you, He changed you. He transformed you into a mini-model of Himself. You have forfeited your goals and embraced God's goals for you. Christ is your captain, and He is not tame. God is refining you for Himself.<sup>49</sup>

Do you understand all that is going on around you? Job did not. Nonetheless, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known."<sup>50</sup>

Will you measure your life upon the timeless scales of eternity or in the milliseconds of immediate gratification? Your answer is found in the heart of the epistle to the Hebrews:

“We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>51</sup>

God sees in your life what Paul saw in the lives of the Thessalonians: “We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.”<sup>52</sup> You are precious to your Lord Jesus, and you appreciate the certainty that “to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”<sup>53</sup>

Jesus says, “I have overcome the world.”<sup>54</sup> May this also be your mantra!

### **Soli Deo Gloria!**

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. 10:32-39

<sup>2</sup> Ro. 6:11-13

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 2:8f.; Jonah 2:9

<sup>4</sup> Phil 2:13

<sup>5</sup> I Pe. 1:6f.

<sup>6</sup> Ro. 5:3

<sup>7</sup> Gal. 2:20; 6:14

<sup>8</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian In Complete Armour* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), p. 259.

<sup>9</sup> Jn. 20:28; Rev. 19:16

<sup>10</sup> Ro. 8:29

<sup>11</sup> Isa. 59:1

<sup>12</sup> I Ki. 17:6

<sup>13</sup> Rev. 1:3

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 28:15

<sup>15</sup> Jn. 17:17

<sup>16</sup> Heb. 10:35

<sup>17</sup> Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> Ps. 139:23f.

<sup>19</sup> I Cor. 10:12

<sup>20</sup> II Pe. 1:6b

<sup>21</sup> Lk. 10:18

<sup>22</sup> Am. 7:8

<sup>23</sup> I Pe. 2:21

<sup>24</sup> Hab. 2:4

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act IV, Scene III.

<sup>26</sup> Heb. 11:27

<sup>27</sup> Heb. 12:2f.

<sup>28</sup> Ro. 12:2

<sup>29</sup> II Cor. 10:5

<sup>30</sup> II Cor. 3:18

<sup>31</sup> I Pe. 2:9

<sup>32</sup> Jn. 19:30

<sup>33</sup> Mk. 14-15; Heb. 12:2

<sup>34</sup> Phil. 3:10

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>36</sup> Heb. 11:9

<sup>37</sup> Lk. 21:19

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 50:20

<sup>39</sup> Nu. 14:24

<sup>40</sup> Ru. 1:16f.

<sup>41</sup> Esth. 4:11; II Cor. 11:27, respectively.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit., Gurnall, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> The sands of Sinai are strewn with the carcasses of non-perseverers, and all of Scripture tells of their shrinking back (Heb. 10:32-39).

<sup>44</sup> Jer. 12:5

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 41; Jon. 2; Mt. 4, respectively.

<sup>46</sup> I Pe. 1:13

<sup>47</sup> Jn. 19:30

<sup>48</sup> Phil. 3:12

<sup>49</sup> Isa. 48:10

<sup>50</sup> I Cor. 13:9,12

<sup>51</sup> Heb. 10:39-11:1

<sup>52</sup> II Thess. 1:4

<sup>53</sup> Phil. 1:29

<sup>54</sup> Jn. 16:33