

Developing Perseverance

In the nineties, there was one man in the NBA who was the most feared fourth-quarter player--Michael Jordan. Michael never quit. When the going got tough and the game was on the line, when other players caved into mental or physical exhaustion, Michael raised his game, went for steals, dove for loose balls, drove the length of the floor and scored. He never gave up. He was an opponent's worst nightmare.

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1)

All of us experience difficult or painful experiences when our heart hungers to find meaning, peace, and even joy in the middle of a crisis. James tells us that to persevere with God through tough times will develop maturity and completeness. However, in the middle of stress, pain, and struggle, most of us feel more ready to quit than to be developed. Charles Swindoll said, "I fear our generation has come dangerously near the 'I'm getting tired so let's just quit' mentality. And not just in the spiritual realm. Dieting is a discipline, so we stay fat. Finishing school is a hassle, so we bail out. Cultivating a close relationship is painful, so we back off. Working through conflicts in a marriage is a tiring struggle, so we walk away. Sticking with a job is tough, so we look elsewhere"

In a world where quitting has become chronic, God says persevere! Too many people are taking the easy way out. Yet God tells us that perseverance through the tough times is the only pathway to what we really long for.

The Bible also tells the story of Job, a good man who honored God. In a very brief period of time Job lost all his sons & daughters, livestock, wealth and all his employees. His body broke out in a painful sickness that included open and aching sores. To top it all off, three of his closest friends told him that this must be a judgment from God due to Job's sin. When Job thought things couldn't get worse, his loving wife whispered in his ear, "If I were you, I'd just curse God and die!" Yet in all of this, Job persevered and clung to God with all his might. He reminded himself that all he had was God's, that God was in charge and that God would make a way. He chose to not respond with sin to take care of his situation when God didn't show up quickly enough.

God is with us. He's promised that. God has told us to give all our cares and anxieties to him because He cares

for us. God promises that He won't give us more than we can handle but that He will give us grace that is sufficient. We have to choose to act as though these promises from God are true or we fail the test and fall into sin, anger, or despair when trouble comes. Trust in God requires that we sometimes have to hold on to what is true when circumstances challenge that for a time. We have to pray. We have to learn to see what is good alongside the trouble. We have to keep on going with what we have. In the end Job received back double what he lost but there was a period of time in between while he had to wait and trust and stick with the truth.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

God wants to use everything in our life for our own healing and for the comfort and strengthening of others. There is an old saying, "Ninety percent of caring is just showing up." Job's friends extended loving care by showing up, weeping with Job, and sitting silently alongside his sickbed. For seven days and nights they sat silently sharing in Job's sorrow. The trouble began when they started talking and trying to explain Job's situation. Sitting in silence is a powerful act of love. God wants to use us, as we learn through suffering, to come alongside others who suffer and be a source of encouragement and comfort to them. We can let people know we are sorry for their loss. We can pray for them. We can give them an opportunity to share about their pain. We can ask them what would be helpful. We can just be still with them and stick with them when others walk out and when we don't have good explanations for what they are currently going through. We can be the loving presence of God for them during the storm in their life.

God is the creator of the world and of us. God has made all of us to give glory to Him. Our life belongs to God. In times of trial it is easy to switch gears and believe that things center around us and the meeting of our needs. The primary challenge for all of us is, do we believe God is with us when we face trials and troubles or are we too busy blaming God for what is happening and for not showing up quickly enough to fix things? Do we see a problem and start proclaiming that God is with us or do we start complaining that God doesn't hear us when we pray and doesn't have power to do what is needed? To endure means to hang on. God promises that if we do, we will lack nothing.