

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH #11  
“Faith Through Perseverance”  
Romans 5:1-5, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12, James 5:7-12

In his book, *Forged by Fire* [(Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 24], Bob Reccord shares a little of his biography. He says, “After college and marriage, I found it easy to put on weight and get out of shape. A year ago, I became committed to working hard to take the ‘sag’ out of my sagging waistline. Day after day, I worked hard on cardiovascular exercises and weight training, seeming to get nowhere. Straining. Sweating. Sucking wind. Questioning my sanity.

“But then after several months, it was as though a quantum leap occurred. Weight began to drop off. Muscle began to get toned. And endurance increased significantly. Medical friends tell me that during the constancy of working out, regardless of how I felt, a whole new freeway system of small blood vessels and capillaries was forming within my body. Then came the day when they decided it was time for a ‘grand opening.’ Suddenly, more blood came flooding into the muscle tissue, and the resultant benefits seemed to be exponential.

“Likewise, when we're walking through the depths of trials, God is building up a secondary support system of endurance that we might be even more prepared for the next time adversity comes our way.”<sup>1</sup> **Endurance comes to us as we press on in faith during hardships.**

And the apostle Paul would agree. We heard in Romans 5 today how suffering and trials works for our benefit in that “*we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance [produces] character; and character [produces] hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us*” (5:3-5). The more we have to endure, the more struggles we face, the deeper our faith in Jesus Christ becomes as we keep turning to Him for help and guidance. Perseverance drives us to keep on keeping on. Perseverance gives us the encouragement not to give up, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, provides us with just the right amount of strength and reassurance we need to go on in life so that we might be useful to the Lord God.

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 84)

**When we trust in the Lord Jesus to walk with us each day, we begin to see that even though we face testing and hardships in our life, we never walk alone.** Jesus promised to be with us, all throughout our lives, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He only wants us to trust in Him, knowing that His promises are trustworthy and true. Jesus told His disciples, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Just think, every trial and every struggle - Jesus has already overcome them! That means there’s not a hardship, or a struggle, or a trial, or a difficulty that Jesus has not already overcome. If we can believe that, then perseverance is possible as we put our faith in Jesus.

And we have that same assurance in the Old Testament. God promised Joshua as he was taking over the leadership of the people of Israel in Moses’ place, God tells him, *“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Joshua 1:5). There is no place in this world that we can go where God is not already there! **There is not a condition that can we find ourselves in where God is not there with us.** There is no valley too deep nor mountain too high that we cannot find God’s presence with us. God only asks that we call out to Him, trust in His presence and guidance through the Holy Spirit, and continue to walk in faith in Him. Those who seek the Lord, those who are called by His Name, are His family, and God takes care of His family.

But we have to do our part. Hebrews 11:6 tells us plainly, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”* If we give up on our faith in God, there is no perseverance given to us because we don’t trust that God can lead us through the difficult times to find His peace.

It’s so easy to find ourselves ready to quit when we are in the middle of the hardships that we face. The way is hard, the emotions are overwhelming, the pressure is crushing, and world has a way of sucking the strength right out of us. **If we try to face all that is surrounding us by ourselves, it is so easy to give up and stop striving to do the work of the Lord.** When all we face is roadblocks and steep cliffs, it’s time we start learning how to climb and rappel so that nothing we face can stop us.

And that happens when we turn to the One who provides us with the strength and courage to press on. God promises us all that we need to continue our life of faith in Him. Like a coach encourages the runners to keep pressing on, especially when the road seems to be the hardest, so God cheers for us to press on and allow His Holy Spirit to grant us what we need.

That thought drew me to go on line to find which mile was the toughest of a 26 mile marathon. Here's what I found: "Many marathon runners claim that the most challenging mile of a marathon is somewhere between the 18th and 23rd one. Of course, this number is highly subjective and depends on many different factors. Some runners might start feeling fatigued quicker than their competitors based on their stamina, conditioning, or mental toughness.

"But what makes it the most challenging mile in the first place? Well, exhausted muscles and a buildup of lactic acid will make that mile hard, at least physically. Then comes the mental aspect of the challenge, when the voice inside tells you to stop and give up. **Remember: your mind will give up far quicker than your body ever will. After all, your body only follows instructions and doesn't think for itself.** When your muscles start getting tired, your mind will begin sending out the message telling you to stop. Depending on your mental conditioning, that voice might be soft and easy to ignore. But even in the toughest of people, that voice will gradually get stronger and louder until you eventually decide to listen to it and stop running. The key, then, is to be physically and mentally tough enough so that you only stop after you've completed the race."

So what do runners do to prepare for their 26 mile run? How can they overcome the "runners' wall? "The first step to overcoming the hardest mile is to expect it. People often give up on long runs because their minds get overwhelmed by the exhaustion they feel in their bodies. If you prepare yourself mentally for the hardest mile, it won't catch you off-guard when it finally happens.

"Second, train your self-talk. All of us talk to ourselves in our minds, but not everyone does so in a positive and supportive manner. Remember: you are your own coach out there. So you'll have to talk to yourself positively. When you say to yourself, 'You can do it!', that's a hundred times more

meaningful than when the crowd says it to you from the sidelines.

“Lastly, adjust your physical pace. When you know that you’re experiencing the toughest mile, it’s an excellent idea to slow down and give your body a chance to rest. You don’t have to come to a complete stop, but you need to slow down and let your body ‘regroup’, so to speak.

“If you manage your toughest mile wisely, you’ll eventually get what marathon runners call a ‘second wind’. That’s when you suddenly feel like you’re getting a boost of energy and inspiration to continue on your marathon.” (January 6, 2021 by Coach Scott, *halfmarathonforbeginners.com*)

That’s excellent advice for each one of us in our own marathon of faith through life. The world is going to throw stuff at us to try to convince us that faith in Jesus is not worth the energy. **The world will do it’s very best to get us to give up our faith and just conform to the things of this world. Expect it and prepare yourself for it.** Trials will come, Jesus told us. So prepare for it by reading your Bible, spending time in prayer, and attending worship and Bible studies. That’s the spiritual discipline that you’re going to need to run your marathon of faith.

Then, **learn to allow the Holy Spirit to talk to you and encourage you along your way** so that you are lifted up and supported by the positive inspiration that the Spirit gives to all who are devoted to following the Lord Jesus. Memorize Scripture so that verses from God’s Holy Word speak to you and come to your mind in the middle of the struggles that you face. While a runner may be on their own in a marathon, we have the benefit of our coach running right beside us in our faith marathon, to challenge us to keep going. Be your best advocate by speaking positive words to yourself.

Finally, if that wall of defeat comes before you, **learn how to change course and select another path that avoids the defeatist attitude.** Call out to the Lord for Him to make Himself present to you in the life of another person to guide you along your way. Then contact another person of faith to run by your side and be the physical presence you need to endure the hardships. Slow down if you need to, but never give up. Surround yourself with all the positive reinforcements you can. Keep on moving in faith with Jesus and you will be given your “second wind” that will take you through to the end of your

hardship. Jesus desires that you finish your marathon of faith well. It may take every ounce of energy you have, but the Holy Spirit will be faithful to provide you all you need to finish your course in faith.

These are the same thoughts of the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the believers in his second letter to the people of Thessalonica. He says, “...among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering” (1:4-5).

**You see, even though you may be suffering terribly, your perseverance in faith in Jesus Christ will be a huge witness to the church and the world.** Your perseverance will then become an encouragement to those around you and all who hear of your endeavor to remain faithful. God will use that situation to build up His church if you remain faithful to Jesus through it all. If we learn to trust in Jesus and let Him become the One who guides us through whatever hardship or trial we face, the testimony of the goodness of God will shine out like a beacon in the darkest night. But we must remain faithful!

James, then, comes along and writes to the family of God to encourage us not to give up during our own persecutions and trials. Listen to what he says about patience in suffering. This is James 5:7-12. (READ James 5:7-12)

Patience and perseverance can be so hard. We live in a time when instant gratification and instant results are almost demanded. When we are called to have patience, we often respond to the Lord, “O Lord, help me to have patience, but I want it NOW!” And we want answers with only one prayer, with only one application, with only one request, and with only one petition.

**But God desires that our faith grows deeper in Him.** So, often our request may go unresolved for a long time because we’re not yet ready for that particular position or resolution of the problem. God may be inviting us to grow deeper in our dependence upon Him before He graciously provides us with our request. He knows the exact thing He wants for us, but the time may not be right, or the job might

not even exist yet. So God invites us to patiently endure the time in between, confident that He knows what is best for us, and we continue to grow closer to the Lord Jesus and allow Him to show us just the right way to just the right resolution to our situation. We must constantly be praying so that God can move at just the right time to bring about His good work. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

In his book, *Herald of His Coming* (January 1994), “nineteenth-century preacher and author A. B. Simpson gives a wonderful example of the power of accumulative prayer [the results of trusting in the Lord during difficult times]. In the city of Rangoon, Burma, resided the largest and finest bell in the East. It was the pride of the great Buddhist Temple, Shwee-da-gone. During one war the bell sank in a river. Over the years, various engineers tried but failed to raise it. At last, a clever priest asked permission to try, but only if the bell was given to his temple.

“The priest had his assistants gather an immense number of bamboo rods. One by one the rods were fastened to the bell at the bottom of the river. After thousands of them had been fastened, the bell began to move. When the last bamboo rod was attached, the buoyancy of the accumulated rods lifted the bronze bell from the mire of the river bottom to the stream's surface.

“A. B. Simpson writes: ‘**Faith can lift the heaviest of burdens and the highest of mountains.** Every whisper of believing prayer is like one of the little bamboo rods. For a time they seem to be in vain, but there comes a last breath of believing supplication, and lo, the walls of Jericho fall, the mountain becomes a plain, and the host of Amalek is defeated.’”<sup>2</sup>

Though patience can be tremendously difficult, especially during times of extreme persecution, God knows where you are and what you are up against. He knows the deliverance He has planned for you, but that deliverance may be dependent upon your faith in Him. Who knows but that God might be using you to touch the life of the one persecuting you, and through your prayers and faithful witness to that one, you are able to show God’s goodness to them and allow them to draw closer to the Lord, too. As you diligently seek the Lord for His guidance and protection, He uses you in a marvelous way to

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<sup>2</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, pg.

bring about the salvation of those around you. But if you give up your faith, if you stop running the marathon of faith in your life, that witness is gone, and the opportunity for touching the life of a lost soul is ended. So **patient perseverance can serve a purpose for God to draw you, and others, closer to Him.**

James tells us, *“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near”* (5:7-9).

All throughout the Bible are examples of folks who patiently persevered whatever they faced and as they continued their faith in the Lord God, they were able to see the promises of the Lord revealed to them. As they faced each day with each problem, they persevered in their faith to follow the Lord.

Noah was called by God to build a boat in order to save his family from a flood even before it had begun raining on the earth. He patiently endured the ridicule and persecution from the people living nearby (Genesis 6-7) in order to get the work done. They didn’t understand that God was going to destroy all humanity and begin once again, hopefully with a people who would worship and follow only Him. Sadly, the people didn’t learn from Noah’s warning and suffered the consequences.

Abraham and Sarah endured many long years without a child being born to them. They continued in faith, even after Sarah told Abraham to take her handmaiden to give them children through her. Yet God had promised both of them that He would make a mighty nation from their family line through Isaac. Their impatience brought a nation that would fight against the people of Israel (Ishmael).

All of the prophets patiently warned the people of Israel and Judah that unless they turned back to the Lord, He would allow them to become attacked, captured, and occupied by foreign nations, and would be forced to endure exile for seventy years. Though the people rebelled against God and His prophets, these men continued to call the people back into faithfulness with the Lord.

And then, the nation of Israel had to wait for another 400 years before the promised Messiah would come. And even then, the leaders of the Temple didn’t receive Jesus. And the apostles and

followers of Jesus had to patiently endure persecution for their faith in Jesus, even dying for their faith, in demonstration of the benefit of having Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives. They were absolutely certain in their understanding of Jesus being the Lord's Messiah, and they were willing to persevere against anything, knowing that this world was not their home, but their home in heaven with Jesus was waiting for them.

**Patience and perseverance is vital for us if we are to see the Lord God complete His purpose in and through us.** If we are faithful to Him, He is faithful to us. Paul says it well in 2 Timothy 2:10-13, *“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying: ‘If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.’”*

**The Lord desires that we remain faithful to Him regardless of what others do around us.** And He has promised to give us the strength and courage to face any trial or struggle so that we might live as His faithful witnesses.

*“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,”* James 5:11 tells us, and Jesus desires that we live faithfully to Him in all our ways, even in our speaking, so that we demonstrate a difference to those who might be watching to see if Jesus is really worth having in their lives.

**So keep running your marathon of faith. Don't give up!** Keep your life in love with Jesus Christ our Lord. Remember that this world is not all there is, but that we await the return our Lord and Savior, Jesus, to take us to our heavenly home with Him. Don't ever stop living for Jesus. Be found faithful in all you do. Let's pray.

Father, in this life there are so many struggles and hardships that can separate us from Your pathway to eternal life. You call us to be faithful in all we do and say, so that we might be encouraged and strengthened to finish our course in faith and live as one of Your disciples. Help us, by Your Holy Spirit, to persevere all things so that we might live well, following all Your ways and commands. Thank You for Jesus, who gives us the hope we need to live for You. Continue to guide and direct us