

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Perseverance...

by: Kris Brewer

A few days ago, I had the opportunity to do something that I immensely enjoy: I went elk hunting here in Southwest Montana. I had a great day, right up to the last two hours of the day. In those last two hours we ended up in a pretty difficult situation. My son and I ended up in the bottom of a steep gorge that was covered pretty extensively with deadfall trees. To make matters worse, we were in an area that has a high grizzly bear population. We only had a couple of hours to get out of the area before dark set in, and we were beginning to get a little nervous as we saw the sea of fallen trees ahead of us, and the nearly 1000 foot climb up the mountain to our escape. All of this came after about 8 miles of hiking and over 2000 feet of elevation climb.

It seemed like all we could do to make it over the last of the fallen trees. Then, staring us in the face, was a steep climb. As I looked at that mountain, I didn't know if I could make it up. I was exhausted. I did not know if I could make my feet and legs move forward

any more! I had pushed my body further than I had in a long while. As we climbed the mountain, we would pick a tree, or a rock that was part way of the hill, and set it as our next goal, hoping we could make it just a little further... and then a little further than that. Eventually, we made it to the top of that mountain, and to the relative safety (in the dark) of a more open field. We still had about 2 miles or more to make it to our vehicle. While hiking down the trail to the truck, I had a couple of flare ups of severe cramps in my legs because of dehydration, yet another sign that my body had been pushed to its limits.

While I enjoy hunting stories, I am really recounting this experience because in the process of hiking that evening, I got to thinking about the spiritual applications I could take away from the experience. There are parallels that can be drawn and lessons that can be learned from a difficult experience. Sometimes, we find the internal fortitude to overcome physical difficulties, but when it comes to spiritual challenges, we can-

not seem to persevere. We need to learn how to push ourselves, often outside our comfort zones, in order to be successful in difficult spiritual circumstances. Let's consider just a few lessons that we can learn from physical difficulties.

See the big picture. If we are going to be spiritually successful, we need to see the big picture out in front of us. What is right in front of us might be daunting, but if we are able to see where we are heading, it makes reaching the goal more reasonable. Sometimes, we allow the immediate challenges that we face to keep us from moving forward at all. If we allow those dead trees that are piled over the trail to keep us from pushing on, we won't have much hope of reaching the ultimate goal.

This was the problem that the Israelites had. They allowed what they saw as overwhelming challenges to keep them from taking the promised land that God was delivering to them. The Hebrew writer warned that we could succumb to the same problem:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His (Hebrews 4:1-10).

The Israelites allowed the challenge of the Canaanites to deter them from entering the promised land. They allowed the immediate problems to interfere with seeing the big picture of what God was giving to them. Christians today can have the same problem. There are many who will miss the rest that is offered to us, simply because they allow the immediate challenges to cloud their view of the big picture that God is offering to us! Seeing the big picture should help us to overcome the immediate difficulties we face.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with

endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We can look to Jesus to see how He overcame the challenges set before Him. He saw the big picture, and knew what awaited Him on the other side. When we see what awaits us on the other side, we should be able to overcome spiritual difficulties!

Set reasonable short term goals. We often talk about our ultimate goal of reaching Heaven, but we don't think about short term goals often enough. Being able to reach a big goal is often made possible by working on smaller, short term goals. When we were climbing that mountain, it seemed impossible to climb to the top. However, by finding a closer goal, and working to reach it, piece by piece, we made it to the top. Often, our journeys as Christians follow a similar path. We can become overwhelmed by the difficulties we face. While long term goals are important, having short term goals makes success seem more reasonable.

At least some of our short term goals should be tangible, measurable actions that tell us that we are moving in the right direction. It is good to say that we are going to pray more, or talk to more people about the gospel. However, it is better to set some more definite goals too. Instead of just saying we will do more evangelism, we should set goals for how many people we want to talk to every day or week. Instead of saying we are going to pray more, we should make a plan of when we want to pray and what we want to be consistent in praying for.

Short term goals make it much easier to keep our focus on both our eternal goal and our current responsibilities. How easy is it to lose our daily focus if we only have a long term goal? As we move forward toward completing our short term goals, we will find ourselves closer and closer to our eternal goal.

Paul wrote about being successful with the immediate goals, and using them to work toward the eternal:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:11-14).

Working to overcome sin in our lives now helps us to reach that salvation that

is “nearer than when we first believed.” Each step forward gets us closer to our eternal goal of heaven. Let’s work diligently to fulfill our daily goals so that we can reach the eternal one!

Don’t try to avoid all challenges. The natural inclination of most people will be to avoid anything that is difficult. If it is hard, we don’t want to do it! However, we learn from scriptures that challenges are an impetus of spiritual growth.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2–4).

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3–4).

Trials or tribulations that we face can and do make us grow. We become stronger as Christians because we face trials, and overcome. If we are trying to protect ourselves from any type of tribulation, we are actually doing ourselves a disservice. It is natural to shield ourselves from those things that would cause pain or difficulty. And yet, the very act of being a Christian can bring physical pain and difficulty.

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:41–42).

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

Paul made it clear that those who are working to live a godly life will suffer persecutions. We cannot live a godly life and shield ourselves from those difficulties. They go hand in hand!

Keep on keeping on. Finally, we can learn from physical challenges that we must simply keep on keeping on. In those physical challenges, there may be no other option but to keep going forward. We need to have the same attitude toward our spiritual challenges. No matter what, we need to keep on moving forward, and never give up! If we allow ourselves to become lax, and flounder in the spiritual deadfalls around us, we will never overcome, and we will never succeed. So, keep on keeping on, moving forward spiritually, until you successfully complete your journey and achieve your eternal reward!

With All Your Heart

by: Kyle Pope

Mark 12:30 reads, “...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment” (NKJV). Our world often speaks of acting with “heart,” but unless we are talking health, this usually doesn’t mean the vessel that pumps blood through our body. Instead, it refers to the seat of our emotion and sensation. We refer to those who pursue their interests as “following their heart.” The stomach of a hungry man is playfully said to be, “the key to a man’s heart.” This use of the concept of the “heart” is often set in contrast to pure thought and reason. The foolish lover may be said to “follow his heart, but not his head.” The older woman may counsel the young woman to “listen to her head, and not her heart.”

The heart as it is portrayed in Scripture is not independent of thought and reason. Consider a number of passages that illustrate this. As Jesus taught He explained to His disciples why He used parables and why they were not understood. He said, “the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them” (Matt. 13:15).

Here Jesus speaks of the heart being able to “understand” but failing to do so. The heart as Jesus portrays it can grow dull. When Jesus spoke of defilement, He helped the people understand that defilement is internal. He taught, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” In this text it is the “heart” that thinks. Jesus shows that the heart is the birthplace of defilement, in that it produces the types of behavior that defile the body and mind. In the same way, Scripture

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

elsewhere teaches that it is the heart that can become hardened (Matt. 19:8), thus rejecting the rational influence of God's word. It is the heart that can doubt (Mark 11:23), thus minimizing the comfort that faith should offer to our thoughts and anxieties.

This is not to suggest that the heart is divorced from emotion. It is the heart that forgives a person. At the end of the parable of the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive although he had been forgiven, in speaking of the servant's punishment Jesus said, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (Matt. 18:35). "Heartfelt" forgiveness is not ritual with no substance. It is genuine. It is meaningful. Although it may be "heart-wrenching" it must be sincere. When Jesus spoke to the scribe about the "first and greatest commandment," the man said of the text above, "to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). Jesus said that this man was not far from the kingdom.

Unlike the modern concept of the heart that is separate from reason and thought, the heart as the Bible portrays it "thinks." When Jesus perceived the disciples arguing about who was the greatest, He was said to know the "thought of their heart" (Luke 9:47). How the heart focuses its thoughts affects how the things of God are received. This, in turn, affects the deeds that one does. The sinner "out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil" (Luke 6:45). The word grows when it is planted in the "noble and good" heart (Luke 8:15). This is what explains conversion. The proud heart who hears the gospel doubts because his dull, hardened heart will not let it grow. Yet, humble hearts which hear the truth, just as those hearts on the day of Pentecost, will be, "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37) and moved to obey the gospel. Paul told the Romans that it is the heart that "believes unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10). From a Biblical standpoint, the rational acceptance of the word of God produces faith. This is not a faith that comes from imagination or wishful thinking. While faith is not based upon sight (2 Cor. 5:7), it is wrong to hold that it is based upon nothing. God's word is its source. Paul also told the Romans that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Our love for God must be "with all of our heart." So many in our world claim wholehearted love for God, yet walk in sin, harbor ungodly thoughts and attitudes,

and allow themselves to maintain ignorance of God's word. Let's never make the mistake of thinking that giving our "heart" to God just means that we have strong emotions for Him. The "heart" God wants is much more than just our feelings, passions, and emotions. It is that part of us which thinks, believes, forgives, is cut, and is able to motivate us to good works. That is what God demands from us and He will be satisfied with no less.

Brief Exhortation

Compiled by: David Riggs

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:3)

A real leader knows the difference between being the boss and being a leader, as illustrated by the following:

- The boss drives his workers; the leader coaches them.
- The boss depends upon authority; the leader on goodwill.
- The boss inspires fear; the leader inspires enthusiasm.
- The boss says, "I"; the leader says, "we."
- The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown; the leader fixes the breakdown.
- The boss knows how it is done; the leader shows how.
- The boss says, "go"; the leader says, "let's go!"

(From Developing The Leader Within You, by John Maxwell p. 5)

The elders should not rule as "lords," but should be examples to the flock.

Daily Bible Reading

November 2018

November 1	Amos 6:1-7:9	November 16	Micah 5:2-15
November 2	Amos 7:10-8:14	November 19	Micah 6
November 5	Amos 9	November 20	Micah 7
November 6	Obadiah 1-9	November 21	Nahum 1
November 7	Obadiah 10-21	November 22	Nahum 2
November 8	Jonah 1:1-16	November 23	Nahum 3
November 9	Jonah 1:17-3:10	November 26	Habakkuk 1:1-2:1
November 12	Jonah 4	November 27	Habakkuk 2:2-20
November 13	Micah 1:1-2:5	November 28	Habakkuk 3
November 14	Micah 2:6-3:12	November 29	Zephaniah 1
November 15	Micah 4:1-5:1	November 30	Zephaniah 2

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