

Growing In Perseverance

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When we encounter pain or discomfort, our natural response is to stop doing whatever it is that is causing the pain or discomfort. The rationale is that if we continue in the action causing the pain that we will incur more pain, thereby compounding the problem and causing even more hurt. So we stop. We do something else instead. Of course, that's a natural instinct that is crucial to our survival. There are numerous instances in life that if we continued in spite of the pain, it would be injurious to our physical bodies.

On the flip side, however, there are multiple times when we must recognize the need to push through pain and endure the suffering because we know it is advantageous for us to do so. This happens to athletes regularly. For instance, a marathon runner will inevitably "hit the wall". It's that point where the body is fatigued, there is a sudden loss of energy, and the runner has to exercise some tremendous mental fortitude to overcome the strong desire to quit running. It would obviously be easier to stop, but that would mean not finishing the race. A runner must push through the wall in spite of the pain.

When Peter lists various character traits that are necessary for us to grow in, he mentions the need for perseverance (2 Peter 1:6). It's a word that is used over 30 times in the New Testament and is sometimes translated endurance or patience. It is this characteristic that one must have in order to push through the wall as an endurance runner, and it's a vital trait for a Christian to have to endure the inevitable obstacles and trials that Satan places in the way.

Jesus, in the parable of the soils (Matt. 13:1-9; 18-23), spoke of the need for his followers to have perseverance. While there were four types of soil presented in the parable, only three of them had seed that fell upon them and germinated. However, two of those didn't last – the seed that fell on the stony ground and the seed that fell among the thorns. Jesus explained that the seed on the stony ground didn't last because it didn't have good roots, and so when the hot sun came up, it was scorched and withered. This represented those who don't have a solid faith that gives them support when tough times come. Tribulation and persecution arise, and they quickly leave and abandon their faith. The seed that fell among the thorns grew but was choked out by the thorns and never produced fruit. The thorns represented the cares and riches of the world that drew the person's attention away from the more important spiritual matters.

In both cases, the plants didn't persevere. This is why Peter stresses the need for perseverance. He knew that there would be tribulation and persecution that would tempt Christians to give up their faith. And he knew that there would be the distractions and temptations of this world that could stunt our growth and keep us from being fruitful.

If we're going to remain faithful, especially when the hard times come, and if we're going to be fruitful, we must grow in perseverance. We must learn to endure, for the race we're running is not a sprint; it's a marathon. We're going to hit the wall and think it's not worth it anymore and want to give up. But if we have added perseverance as one of our qualities, then we can push through that wall knowing the rewards that lie on the other side.

One of the major themes of Hebrews is the need for perseverance in the face of trials, and in Hebrews 12:1-2, the author uses the analogy of the long-distance runner. He admonishes us to *“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.”* If Jesus could persevere through many more hardships than we will ever experience, then certainly we can persevere, also.

If we will keep in mind the joy that awaits us, then it will help diminish whatever trials and temptations come our way. It will help us push through that wall. Grow in your faith, in your knowledge of God, your love for Jesus, and your love for the brethren, constantly meditating upon the goodness of God and the home we have prepared for us in heaven, and you will grow in perseverance. And with the help the Lord has promised you, you'll be able to hurdle whatever challenges and temptations Satan places in your path.