

Running with Perseverance

Billy, who usually earned money mowing lawns, was slow about leaving his house on Saturday morning; and his father asked why.

"Well," answered Billy, "I'm waiting until they get started. I get most of my work from people who are already half way through."

Hebrews 12:1-6 ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. A sprint lasts a mere 15 to 20 seconds whereas a marathon is an endurance race. Every person can run a marathon if they put their minds to it. But once you start it takes a lot of perseverance to complete the race. It is easy to start but then after a few kilometers exhaustion, fatigue, cramps and other ailments start coming into the picture. It takes perseverance in spite of these things to continue running to complete the race.

The word 'Perseverance' has the implication of steadfastness, patience and persistence and is confirmed by the Greek verb meaning 'to attend constantly, continue unswervingly, adhere firmly, to hold fast to.'

1) Reasons for the need to persevere

- Internal obstacles in the race
 - Everything that hinders us – not necessarily bad but hinders us from finishing the race that God has set before us. Things that way us down – an athlete running in a full heavy track suite. Could be inner temptation.
 - Sin – would we resist sin to the point of shedding our blood?
 - Hebrews 12:4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
 - Fatigue, burnout, loss of desire/motivation to continue.
 - Not sure why we are in the race – loss of direction/purpose.
- External obstacles in the race
 - External temptations
 - Hardships
 - Acts 20: 23 – 24 "I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."
 - Persecution
 - Relationship problems
- Be aware that we can persevere in one area of our lives yet fall short in another – example of the churches of Ephesus and Thyatira.
 - Revelation 2:2-4 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

- Revelation 2:19-20 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.
²⁰ Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

2) The means of perseverance

- Set our eyes on Jesus – his person, his salvation, his grace, his example – and not on the issues at hand.
 - Know that the grace of God is always at hand.
- Keep focussed on the end of the race
 - Philippians 3: 12 – 14 “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”
- Accept the Lord's discipline.

3) The outcome of perseverance

- We will reap a harvest - fruitfulness
 - Galatians 6: 9 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
- We develop godly character
 - Romans 5: 3 – 4 “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”
- A Crown of Righteousness.
 - 2 Timothy 4: 6 – 8 “For I am already poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearance.”