

Introduction: What Is Perseverance?

We live in a world where according to Jesus we will surely have trouble (John 16:33). Some trials and tribulations simply come from living in this fallen world and are those which are common to man. Some trouble is the unique variety that afflicts a child of God living in an unbelieving world. Some of our trials are internal—the “Romans 7” type—as we yearn to grow in grace, but find sin still firmly rooted within us. Whatever the brand of struggles we face, we need a secure hope to “hang in there” over a lifetime of growing in grace.

In Hebrews 6:19 hope is called an “anchor for the soul.” That is a tremendous image, the picture of an anchor giving security and stability to a ship in a midst of a storm. That is what hope does for us, and more. (Romans 5:2-5) We can remain steadfast, trusting God through present difficulties and pains, because we know the outcome...Only with a secure hope rooted in the faithfulness of God will we be able to weather the storms of life...It is our total confidence that Christ will complete the work He began in us that enables us to persevere over a lifetime. Without hope, people give up. The Christian life must not only be empowered by faith; it must also be sustained by hope. (Adapted from Growing in Grace, Bob George, pp. 131-132, 141, 144)

STUDIES

1. Using a dictionary, define perseverance and endurance.

Let’s now define perseverance and endurance biblically. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. This is our key passage for the whole study. Notice that the imagery used here suggests an athletic contest in a great amphitheater with many witnesses. Just who are these witnesses?!

2. Read Hebrews 11. Choose 5 of the witnesses to list below by name or description. Pay particular notice to any challenging life circumstances given about them.

3. The job of a witness is to testify. According to Hebrews 12:1-3, their lives testified that perseverance is possible. The question then is “How?” To help you derive an answer, first reread Heb. 11:1, 6 then look for one phrase that is consistently used in the Hebrews 11 chapter. What does this tell you about how the witnesses persevered through all those challenging (or ordinary) life circumstances?

From the Greek: The Greek word translated “endurance” (NET) or “perseverance” (NIV) literally means “an abiding under; to abide.” In other New Testament verses, it is translated “patience.” Patience may be passive, that is, endurance under the general trials of life, Christian service, or discipline. Patients may also be active (perseverance) which involves persistence in well-doing, fruit-bearing, and running the appointed race despite trials and distractions of life. (Vines Complete Expository Dictionary, page 462-463)

4. Although the words endurance and perseverance may be used interchangeably, perseverance carries the connotation of whole life experience and is active. It is staying power. It gives us a long-term perspective. Back to Hebrews 12:1-3, who is to be our focus as we run this race with perseverance?

5. Read John 15:5; 14:6; 8:31-32. What does it mean to fix your eyes on Jesus, and why should you?

Scriptural Insight: One truth providing a track for our journey is our life of dependent faith in the living Christ. When Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), He meant exactly what He said. . . . The same Word which tells us "Apart from Me you can do nothing" also says "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). The keywords are through Him. That is opposed to a life of self-improvement, self-development, or self-control...We mustn't be concentrating on "living by faith in Christ" but on "living by faith in Christ." We can make ourselves nervous wrecks worrying about how much faith we have and trying to conjure up more while missing Him who is the object of our faith. We "grow in grace" by focusing on Him "who is full of grace and truth." We are called first and foremost to a Person... There is a striking parallel between the baby's dependent relationship with its mother and our life of dependency on Christ. Because of its dependent life, a baby in the womb could say, "For me, to live is Mom." In the same way, we can say, "For me, to live is Christ." (Bob George, Growing in Grace, p. 22-26, 78)

6. The Christian life is pictured as a long-distance race rather than a short sprint. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 2:14-16. How are we to run? Explain in your own words.

7. Your Life's Journey: Hebrews 12:1-2 refers to distractions that interfere with our running our "race of life" successfully. Think about things in your own life that are encumbrances or entanglements to you. No doubt they will be very similar to those distracting the people we will be studying through these lessons. Describe them through words or drawings in the space below.

8. Perseverance involves a choice. What are the benefits of choosing to persevere to the finish? Read the following verses to derive your answer: James 1:2-4, 12; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

9. Your Life's Journey: Based on your answers to the previous question, how might choose to persevere in your life give you real hope (a confident, eager expectation of a coming certainty) for today and the future?

10. Read Isaiah 43:1-3; Romans 8:28, 38-39; Phil. 1:6. What does God promise to us as we run the race?

Our study will look at some of those witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11—in particular, 4 Old Testament heroes whose lives were full of ups and downs. We will look at the circumstances challenging them year after year, what they believed about God and how that faith sustained them. Perseverance. We will also see choices they had to make to remain faithful to God or not, and how each was affected by the choices. Perseverance.

Through their lives, we will glean truths about running with perseverance throughout our entire lives as believers. May God bless you as you study His Word.