

LESSON 4

Perseverance

Perseverance is essential for success in any task. Success in business, sports, politics, education, and science is not necessarily dependent on one's talent or intelligence. Rather, more often, success is a result of perseverance. Successful people simply do not give up, even when everything is working against them.

This principle of perseverance is essential in the Christian life. A Christian must have the mindset that is determined to live for the Lord regardless of circumstances. The great people in the Bible and in church history persevered; many men and women of God have faced impossible tasks and huge difficulties, but God brought about victory because they persevered.

Today, God still desires all Christians to persevere. He does not bring us into His kingdom only to have us quit and fail. God has a plan for every believer, and His desire is to see that plan completed. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." However, for the "good work" to be completed, it will require our perseverance.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Definition of Perseverance
Importance of Perseverance
The Motivation for Perseverance
Hindrances to Perseverance
How to Persevere
The Rewards of Perseverance

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Define perseverance.*
2. *Indicate the importance of perseverance.*
3. *Describe the key motivating factor for perseverance.*
4. *State what hinders perseverance.*
5. *Identify God's resources to help us persevere.*
6. *Name rewards for those who persevere.*

The Definition of Perseverance

Objective 1:

Define perseverance.

The word *perseverance* means persisting in, or remaining constant to a purpose, task or belief in spite of obstacles and opposition. It is the ability to endure pain, disappointment, and discomfort without quitting or letting down. Perseverance has the idea of remaining steadfast and faithful even when everything is going against us. Perseverance requires endurance.

The Greek word that is used most often in the Bible for perseverance suggests the meaning bear up under a load. This is what we do when we persevere. We hold steady and remain true although we may be pressed from all sides. Depending upon the version of the Bible, this Greek word is translated with words such as patience, endurance, steadfastness, and perseverance.

Importance of Perseverance

Objective 2:

Indicate the importance of perseverance.

When we decide to follow Christ, our life takes on new meaning. We experience new joy and peace, and we begin a relationship with God through Christ. However, just because we are Christians does not mean that life necessarily becomes easier. Sometimes life becomes more difficult because we have made the decision to follow Christ. For instance, we may face difficulties and challenges that we never experienced before.

Nevertheless, we should not be surprised when these times come. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble." Furthermore, when Paul and Barnabas revisited the churches of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, one of their main messages to the churches was, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"

(Acts 14:22). Peter wrote in his first epistle, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). The Bible is very clear that since we live in a sin-cursed world, we will face difficult times. During such times it is essential that the Christian persevere.

There are various situations that require Christians to persevere. These situations can either make or break us as Christians. These times will cause those who persevere to grow stronger in their faith, and for those who do not persevere, it can cause their faith to falter or even die. Following are instances when we need to persevere.

Persevere in Difficult Tasks

God calls some Christians to be pastors or missionaries in difficult places. Sometimes, these ministers become discouraged and may want to give up. Nevertheless, in such situations perseverance is needed. Think of the many successful soul-winning churches and ministries worldwide. If you were to study the history of these ministries, you would probably find that they endured great hardship and difficulties. Maybe there was persecution, financial hardship, or other setbacks. Yet, there was a pastor, missionary, or congregation that persevered and hung on to the promises of God, and today we see the result of such perseverance.

Nehemiah felt God directing him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of that defeated city. Once he arrived there he saw that the walls of the city in ruins. The task of rebuilding the walls looked overwhelming. Yet, Nehemiah organized the people and materials and started the building project. Shortly after beginning the work, he and the people faced opposition from neighboring enemies. But Nehemiah persevered and turned to God for strength. Because of Nehemiah's persistence and leadership, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 52 days (see Nehemiah 2–6). What had previously looked impossible was accomplished because of perseverance.

Persevere When Suffering

Paul was a mighty man of God. One reason why he is such a great example is that of the suffering he endured for the sake of the Gospel. In one of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, we get a glimpse of the hardships he confronted,

As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:4–10)

Paul suffered as well from a condition he referred to as a "thorn in my flesh". There are many interpretations as to what the thorn was. Whether it was a physical ailment or a spiritual struggle we do not know for certain. But we do know that whatever his thorn was, Paul suffered from it. He called it, "a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me" (2 Corinthians 12:7–8). The use of the words "torment" and "pleaded" shows that Paul suffered greatly from this affliction. He felt tormented, and he seriously sought the Lord for his situation to be changed. The thorn was never removed, but Paul persevered.

Paul suffered also because of persecution for preaching the Gospel. In his final letter to Timothy, he writes, "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions,

sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (2 Timothy 3:10–11). As Paul approached the end of his life, he wanted Timothy to remember not only his teaching and way of life, but also the fact that he had endured persecution.

In verse 12, Paul tells Timothy, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” If we live for the Lord, we will face persecution. It may be a mild form of persecution such as being shunned by non-Christians or mocked. Or, it may be more serious forms of persecution such as arrest, beatings, or even martyrdom. The history of the church is full of examples of people who persevered under persecution, some even to the point of death.

Persevere When Life Does Not Make Sense

One of the most difficult times in which we need perseverance is when the events of life do not make sense. We have a tendency to believe that if we live in obedience everything will be fine. Then, when things do not work out as we expected, we become doubtful and may ask ourselves, “Is this what I get for being so dedicated in serving God? Wasn’t God hearing my prayers? Did He really notice my faithfulness? Is it worth pressing on in the Christian life?”

A businessman may faithfully tithe and be generous in his giving to the work of the Lord, but instead of prosperity, he experiences bankruptcy due to events beyond his control. Parents may have dedicated their children to the Lord and raised them in the things of God only to see the children rebel against them and the faith. A sincere Christian husband may sincerely pray for the healing of his wife whom he loves deeply, only to see her eventually die—leaving him alone to raise their children. A missionary couple may have spent years in study and preparation to minister in a foreign field, yet have to resign shortly after arriving on the field because of an accident that leaves them disabled.

These kinds of events happen even to the most sincere and faithful of God's people. And this reality seems to go against everything we hear about God's goodness and power. However, when such things happen, we must exercise perseverance and trust in God's faithfulness, wisdom, and sovereignty or authority.

Deliverance in God's Time

Joseph is a good example of one who persevered even when the events of life did not make sense. Joseph was a godly young man, with great potential. When he was a teenager, his brothers sold him into slavery because of their jealousy of him. As a slave, Joseph was falsely accused of rape and was put into an Egyptian prison. Then he was forgotten by those who promised to seek his release. From all appearances, God had forsaken Joseph. Yet, Joseph persevered in living for God, and God honored Joseph's trust. In the end, when Joseph was prime minister of Egypt, he understood how God had been in control of every event of his life.

God is in control of the events of every believer's life. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." If we believe that God is working on our behalf, we will persevere even when things do not make sense.

The Need to Persevere

There are two basic reasons to persevere: for success in spiritual warfare and for growth.

Spiritual Warfare

Christians need to persevere because we are in a spiritual battle. Before we came to Christ, we were living as Satan wanted us to; we were dead to spiritual things. However, when we became Christians or children of God, our way of living and our desires changed. Instead of living according to our own ways, we now desire God's way. Yet, Satan tries to pull us back into the old life of sin. This is the spiritual battle taking place.

An example of someone who persevered while in spiritual warfare is Job. One day Satan appeared before God, and God asked him, “‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil’” (Job 1:8). Satan responded that Job was serving God only because God had put a hedge of protection and blessing around Job. Satan argued that if the hedge were removed, Job would curse God. So Job was put to the test. Satan began to afflict Job with the loss of his children, possessions, and eventually his health. All these afflictions were designed by Satan to ruin Job and destroy his faith in God. But through it all, Job persevered!

One notable spiritual battle in the New Testament is that of Satan’s temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness over a forty-day period (see Luke 4:1–13). Satan’s desire was to cause Jesus to sin and ruin God’s plan of redemption. Yet, Jesus remained steadfast and was victorious over Satan. When the 40 days were over and Satan realized that he had been defeated, he left Jesus alone for a time.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus faced many other spiritual battles. The supreme test was the one Jesus faced upon the Cross. Hebrews 12:2 states that Jesus “endured the cross.” It was on the Cross that Jesus persevered and brought about salvation for all humankind. In the Christian life, we will face many spiritual battles and temptations, but we can also experience the victory of Christ if we persevere.

Growth through Perseverance

The second reason why we need perseverance is that it produces good character and traits in our life. When we become Christians, God begins a refining process in our lives. He molds us into the image of His Son and works to remove the unholy things in our lives. One way God accomplishes this is by allowing us to experience trials.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:3–4, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character,

hope.” James also commented on the benefits of perseverance: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4).

Trials and sufferings show us what is important. They open our eyes to what is temporal and what is eternal. The hard places we go through make the hope of heaven more real. Paul describes this in Romans 8. In verses 21–23, he presents creation as groaning and in travail, waiting to be delivered from its bondage. Paul states that not only does creation groan, but so do we as we await the adoption of sons and the redemption of our bodies. We received this hope when we were saved and “wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:25). Thus, we persevere.

Some of the most mature Christians you will meet are those who have gone through difficult experiences. Maybe they experienced prolonged sickness, the death of a loved one, financial hardship, a major setback, or grave persecution for their faith. Yet they remained faithful and endured. Moreover, they still have a sweet spirit, godly character, and vibrant faith. These are evidences of God’s working in their lives during the trial and producing Christ-like qualities in them.

So although we may not like suffering and difficulty, we must persevere—for victory and for God to develop His qualities in us. The character traits God wants to develop in us require time. Thus, we must be patient and allow God to complete His work in us.

The Motivation for Perseverance

Objective 3:

Describe the key motivating factor for perseverance.

What causes a Christian to endure persecution for the sake of Christ? What enables Christians to keep on serving God when it appears that God has forsaken them? What

causes a Christian to hold on to the promises of God when there are so many obstacles? What motivates the Christian to persevere? The greatest motivator in perseverance is one's love for God. Our endurance will be based on our depth and sincerity of love for the Lord. The deeper our love for the Lord, the greater will be our perseverance.

We Love the Lord Because He First Loved Us

If we grasp the great love God has for us and understand the price Jesus paid for our salvation, we will respond to God in love and perseverance. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, had sat as a student at the feet of the Apostle John. For 60 years, Polycarp had a powerful ministry in Asia Minor. In 156 A.D., persecution broke out against the Christians. Polycarp was a target of those who were persecuting the church. At the age of eighty-six, Polycarp was arrested. He was taken before the governor, who pressed him to deny Christ and swear by the divinity of Caesar. Polycarp replied, "Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" (Martyrdom of Polycarp 9:12–9:13). Polycarp stood fast to his confession of faith in Christ. Because of this, he was sentenced to be burned at the stake.

Love for Christ will motivate us to do whatever He asks of us. The story is told of a young nobleman named Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf who, after graduation from the university at Wittenberg, embarked on a tour of Europe. He went to the art museum at Dusseldorf and saw a painting entitled "Behold the Man". It was a picture of the thorn-crowned Christ gazing at the viewer. Under the painting were the words, "I have done this for you; what have you done for me?" Zinzendorf thought, "I have loved Him for a long time, but I have never actually done anything for Him. From now on I will do whatever He leads me to do." From that point, the young Count Zinzendorf became a great Christian leader, starting the Moravian movement which sent multitudes of missionaries around the world.

First Corinthians 13:7–8 tells us that love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.” If we love Christ, this love will inspire us to keep on going no matter what the difficulty. It will motivate us to endure whatever hardship for Him.

Hindrances to Perseverance

Objective 4:

State what hinders perseverance.

As we have seen, all Christians will face difficulties, trials and persecution at some point. Some persevere, while others do not. Let us focus now on factors that hinder our ability to persevere.

Unconfessed Sin

The most obvious reason some Christians do not persevere is that of sin in their lives. Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters, for we will love one and hate the other. Love for Christ motivates us to persevere. If our affections are on pleasures of the flesh and the world instead of on Christ, it will hinder our perseverance. We must live a holy life to persevere.

Attachment to Worldly Things

Another hindrance to perseverance that is closely related to sin is a love for things of the world. Some people will quit serving God if it means a loss of position, possessions, or finances. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning Demas: “Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:10). At one time, Demas had been listed as a fellow worker of Paul’s (Philemon 24). But Demas gave in to the pull of the world and abandoned the ministry.

Unresolved Discouragement

Another hindrance is unresolved discouragement. Everybody becomes discouraged from time to time. The discouragement may be short-lived, lasting just a few minutes or hours; or it may be more intense, lasting days. When discouragement stretches beyond a few

days, however, one needs to be alert to the more serious problem of depression.

God does not want us to linger in discouragement or despair. As we have previously seen, God will use trials to refine and develop us, but Satan will use trials to discourage us. Discouragement is a tool of Satan. In Psalm 73, an anointed man of God, Asaph, relates how he became discouraged when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. He said that his feet almost slipped as he looked at what seemed to be the easy life of those who ignore God. He felt that his efforts in serving God had been in vain. But when he went into the sanctuary of God, he understood the end of the wicked. He realized that the prosperity the wicked enjoy is only temporary. Being in God's presence helped him to have a new perspective on his situation.

In times of difficulty, it is critical that we guard our minds from things that would bring discouragement, and focus our minds on the promises of God. God's promises will produce hope and enable us to persevere.

How to Persevere

Objective 5:

Identify God's resources to help us persevere.

The Christian's perseverance is different from that of a non-Christian. When non-Christians encounter problems, they persevere because of personal grit and determination. And each person has a limit as to what he or she can handle. As Christians, we have more than just personal determination; we also have heavenly resources that enable us to persevere.

Exercise Faith

To persevere, we need faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." What enables believers to persevere? They have faith that believes God is at work even though the situation is difficult and there is no physical evidence that things will change. Faith is simply putting one's trust in the nature and character

of God. It believes that He is holy and righteous, loving and faithful, and that He is true to His promises. Faith enables us to overcome the world (1 John 5:4).

Hebrews 11 lists several biblical characters who overcame great difficulties because of their faith. It was faith that enabled Noah to persevere 120 years as he built the ark. Faith enabled Abraham, well advanced in years, to persevere while waiting 25 years for the birth of a promised son. Faith enabled Moses to persevere as he led God's people out of Egyptian bondage and into the Promised Land. The chapter concludes by listing unnamed people who saw great victories because of their faith. The same faith also enabled others to persevere although they never saw the fulfillment of what God had promised them. They persevered because they knew God had something better for them.

The Word of God

The Word of God builds our faith and will encourage us. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." If we want to persevere, we need to study the Word. We need to know the promises of God. In the wilderness, Jesus persevered and overcame the temptations of Satan by the power of the Word. It is the same Word of God that is able to help us have victory.

The Bible is God's revelation of himself. As we read the Bible, we gain a better understanding of the character and nature of God. The Word shows us that God is good and faithful to His promises. From His Word, we discover that we can trust God to see us through whatever we face.

Christian Fellowship

Having fellowship with the people of God also helps us to persevere. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." This admonition was written to people who were going through difficult times. Later in chapter 10, the writer to the Hebrews

reminds his audience of the sufferings and persecutions they had endured. He writes, “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised” (Hebrews 10:35–36).

One of the ways we persevere is by drawing strength and encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is one of the functions of the church. We draw courage from one another, we hear how God demonstrated his faithfulness and power in others’ lives, we pray together, we help one another—all of which help us to persevere.

The Holy Spirit’s Power

Just before Jesus went to the Cross He promised the disciples that He would not leave them comfortless but would provide for them the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit. The word *Comforter* in the original means “one called along side of.” The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who is there to help us, empower us, and comfort us when we are going through trials. As we rely on Him we are able to persevere.

The Rewards of Perseverance

Objective 6:

Name rewards for those who persevere.

Towards the end of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul urged his readers to persevere. He wrote, “Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Here we see that whatever we do for the Lord is of value. This includes the times we persevere. God keeps record of all we do, and the Bible is very clear that there are rewards for those who persevere.

Revelation 2–3 records Jesus’ evaluation of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. Jesus knew the work of each church. He knew where five of the seven churches fell short. But He also had a promised reward for each of the churches that would overcome or persevere.

Following are several blessings you too can expect for persevering.

Fulfillment of God's promises

The writer of Hebrews encourages us, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (Hebrews 10:36). The only way to see the fulfillment of God's promises is to remain steadfast in faith.

Blessedness

Another promise for those who persevere is that they will be considered blessed. James writes, "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered" (James 5:11). The Amplified Bible indicates that to be considered blessed means to be "happy," "enviously fortunate" or "spiritually prosperous." In other words, if you want to be happy, fortunate, and spiritually prosperous, you must demonstrate perseverance.

A Powerful Influence

If we persevere, we will make a big difference in the lives of others. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:15–16). Since most of us have people who depend upon us, almost everything we do has an impact, either positively or negatively, on others.

When Paul was in prison writing to the church of Philippi, he said that his imprisonment had been an encouragement to others. He wrote, "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (Philippians 1:14). Because Paul remained steadfast, others found the courage to do so as well.

Reigning with Christ

Most important, if we persevere, we will reign with Christ. Second Timothy 2:11–12 says, "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." Those who persevered through difficulty and even martyrdom looked beyond to the day when they would see Jesus. The hope and knowledge of seeing Christ and being with Him through all eternity encourages us to persevere. The greatest reward of all will be to see God and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of my kingdom."

Conclusion

To be victorious in the Christian life demands perseverance. Satan and life in general will present many occasions that will tempt us to doubt God or give up. In those times, we must remember that God's goal for every Christian is victory. He has provided heavenly resources that enable us to do His will. There will be a day of reward for those who persevere.

Reference

"The Martyrom of Polycarp or Letter of the Smyrnaeans." Apostolic Fathers (Lightfoot). Wesley Center for Applied Theology. Nampa, ID. Accessed July 2, 2007, http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/fathers/ante-nic/polycarp/polmart.htm

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Romans 5:3–4

1 Corinthians 15:58

1 Timothy 6:11–12

2 Timothy 2:11–12

2 Timothy 3:12

Hebrews 10:36

Hebrews 12:1–3

James 1:2–4

1 Peter 1:5–8

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- To persevere means to*
 - give up.*
 - bear up under a load.*
 - sweat.*
- Job experienced trials because*
 - he sinned.*
 - he lacked faith.*
 - Satan attacked Job.*
- The purpose of trials is to produce in us*
 - perseverance, godly character, and hope.*
 - more trials.*
 - depression and defeat.*
- Everyone who lives a godly life in Christ will*
 - have no problems.*
 - have great wealth in this life.*
 - suffer persecution.*
- The greatest motivation for us to persevere is*
 - our love for the Lord.*
 - what others will think of us.*
 - just plain grit and determination.*
- Faith is*
 - working up good feeling.*
 - trusting in the person and character of God.*
 - saying the right words and rejecting the reality of anything negative.*
- One thing that hinders our ability to persevere is*
 - Christian fellowship.*
 - our love for worldly things.*
 - studying the Word.*
- If we want to persevere,*
 - we must have a lot friends who will help us.*
 - faith is essential.*
 - we must make plans and goals to succeed.*

9. *When we persevere,*
 - a) *others are influenced and strengthened in their walk with the Lord.*
 - b) *Satan attacks us all the more.*
 - c) *we are not guaranteed victory.*

10. *We can successfully live the Christian life*
 - a) *without perseverance.*
 - b) *with no problems.*
 - c) *with God's supernatural resources.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *b* (4.1)
2. *c* (4.2)
3. *a* (4.2)
4. *c* (4.2)
5. *a* (4.3)
6. *b* (4.5)
7. *b* (4.4)
8. *b* (4.5)
9. *a* (4.6)
10. *c* (4.6)

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